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RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

BY

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Rhythm in English Poetry

INTRODUCTION

I KNOW something of six literatures and there is none that I consider the equal of English. I know something of six languages and I know none that possesses a vocabulary so rich and so diversified as our own, a texture so elastic and at the same time so close-fitting, a structure that admits of every range from extreme simplicity to sonorous and impressive elaboration. In the beauty of its vowel sounds English is surpassed, certainly by Spanish, Italian, and French, perhaps also by German; but nevertheless in the hands of a master it is capable of the most melodious and magical effects. As a nation, we neglect our study of English. In our schools it is not the first and ever-present care of our instructors, the main exercise of youthful minds, as is French in France. The English people should never be satisfied until English in our schools and colleges has won by universal consent the first place of honour, and has become the first object of solicitous and continuous attention.

But our present subject is not English in general, but English poetry, and one element alone in English poetry—that is, the element of rhythm. We must neglect for the time the content of the poetry: the pictures that it calls to our minds, the narrative that it

unfolds in epic or dramatic form, the philosophy it embodies, the views of life and of conduct that it sets forth, the emotions of joy, pity, terror, hatred, love, that it evokes, the personalities and interactions of personalities that it brings into artificial life, the vision greater than humanity that it summons into being.

I must even neglect for my present purpose the actual quality of the words and phrases that make up the poetry—what the Italians admirably call the texture. In poetry the magic of the poet works through the quality of the individual words, by the virtue of the phrases which result from their skilful combination, by their harmony in themselves and with the poet's thought. But my plan to be followed here demands concentration on one aspect alone—the rhythmical movement that runs through the texture. It is this movement, this orderly movement, that gives to every poem, every poetic passage, its specific character—I might say, its vital heart-beat. While prose has its own rhythmic movement which may be as admirable as that of poetry, it obeys more subtle laws, and it even offends if the pattern of its rhythm is too regular, and if rhyme or alliteration are too obvious. But poetry, it would seem, must have an apparent regularity in its movement. Something will be said later about *vers libres*, verses that move like prose without any satisfying law, verses that are neither prose nor poetry, but a more or less successful hybrid. Such verses may have a *rhythm of their own, but it is not the rhythm of poetry.*

Music, like poetry, has measure and rhythm. Where music and poetry meet in the singing of poetry, music may take the bit within its teeth and run clean away

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with the poetry. On the other hand there are admirable examples in which the music adopts the measured movement of the poetry and gives to it an added meaning and a more than double charm. Poetry and music have each a specific quality; each has a measure, each has rhythm, but with the give and take of sympathetic movement each gains. I had hoped to illustrate such happy partnership by the bold, stirring, and varied rhythms of Tennyson's *Revenge* (p. 89) and, therewith, by referring to the masterly interpretation of that poem in the Cantata of my friend, Charles Villiers Stanford. But that I found to be impossible, without quoting from the score.

There are qualities held in common by music and poetry; each has been and will be influenced by the other; but we shall not expect the two arts to be governed by the same laws. For instance, strict measurement of time is necessary where a choir has to sing the same words and the same music in unison or in harmony. The measurement of time in poetry does not need the same exactitude. The writer and his hearer or reader will be satisfied with a measure that is elastic, and will probably get the higher pleasure from rhythm that is suggested and indicated rather than unduly emphasised. The tom-tom effect that pleases the nigger-minstrel is repulsive to the more delicate ear. The barbarous jazz music has to be syncopated to be tolerable.

Metre can be reckoned, rhythm can only be felt. *I do not attempt to calculate the incalculable. I offer my examples for the delight of the willing and the worthy. By examples only can Rhythm be defined.*

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

AUTHORITIES

In a pamphlet published by the English Association—*Some Thoughts about Verse*: by T. S. Omond, 1923—the author said in effect: “For many generations we have been studying Greek and Latin versification at schools and colleges. Meanwhile we have been writing excellent poetry in English which is constructed not with reference to quantity, like the Greek poetry, but mainly with reference to accent. We have erred in using similar terms of two diverse forms of art.” With that last conclusion I agreed: it is wrong to speak bluntly, with regard to English poetry, of iambics, trochaics, dactyls, or anapaests; those terms are only applicable by analogy which needs explanation and qualification. But then I found Omond saying: “We English have an immensely powerful stress-accent, more powerful than any other European nation.” I said to myself: “That’s not true. There are many European languages which I don’t know, but German at any rate has a much heavier and more rigid stress accent than English.” Two years or more after issuing this unspoken challenge, I found that the subject had made me a prisoner, and I had to say my say.

For further instruction on the subject, I may mention that: (1) In a book entitled *Rhythm*, Basil Blackwell, 1925, E. A. Sonnenschein and Professor Daniel Jones give all that can be needed about the facts of quantity; (2) a great master of rhythm, Robert Bridges, has analysed the rhythms of Milton, who, together with Chaucer and Shakespeare, has done most to build up

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our native rhythm. I think that even Bridges in that book (Milton's prosody, 1893; latest reprint, 1921) is too much preoccupied with the skeleton of rhythm. He attempts to justify the departures of his author from a strict system of quantity, long and short, from a regular succession of long and short syllables, from a regular succession of stresses. You will learn from him a great deal, if you take the trouble. But you will learn much more if you study the practice of Bridges himself, and forget the Greeks and the Latins. Again, it is always very interesting, up to a point, to learn what a foreigner thinks about our English speech, or indeed any English attribute. So, if you have a really enquiring mind, you may read M. Paul Verrier, on *Les principes de la métrique Anglaise*; Paris, Librairie Universitaire, 1909. No one can know so much about the subject as M. Verrier thinks he does.

When I was directed to the elaborate, rare, and voluminous work of Doctor William Thomson, *The Rhythm of Speech* (Maclehose, Glasgow, 1923), I hoped, or perhaps rather I feared, that my own conclusions had been anticipated. He discusses accent, stress, quantities, long and short, but he fails to perceive, or at any rate to declare, that the art of rhythmical speech begins where the grammar of prosody ends; that rhythmical composition is a living act of creation which invests its elements with the infinite variety of life. Still less did he recognise that English is a living tongue, perhaps the most flexible living instrument of human speech. And because it is still alive, it manifests forth beauties some of which we must miss in Latin and Greek which are no longer to be heard in living use.

CHAPTER I

METRE AND RHYTHM.

A. The Greeks

AFTER this introduction, dogmatic in form for the sake of brevity, I will first explain what I believe to be the history of quantity as the governing element of rhythm in poetry, and I shall venture to quote even Greek and Latin to illustrate my points. Some of you will know those languages, but those who do not will, I believe, if they try, hear the quantities and thus seize the rhythm; possibly, even the melody. Those who find the effort too severe, may probably gather the essentials from the English text and pass over the passages quoted from Greek and Latin poets.

Metre, which is the skeleton of rhythm, is the measure of verse. The measure must take count of (1) the number of syllables; (2) the duration of the syllables; (3) the stress or accent falling (or not falling) on particular syllables—of all three of these or at least of two. All these factors combine to shape English rhythm, but the stress or accent has little to do with Greek versification. We shall never quite know what was the exact significance of Greek accents as marked in our books. But we must remember that the great poets of Greece did not mark the accents in their writings; that they first began to be marked in writings

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of a much later date, perhaps in order that a public of alien readers might be aided to pronounce the words; that, so far as we have any direct evidence, they gave indications as to pitch of voice, and not of stresses. If they had indicated stress, they would have put the scheme of quantitative verse out of gear. By what stages these accents came later to indicate stress, as they do in Modern Greek, we shall perhaps never know; at present we can only guess.

We shall have no difficulty then in the case of Ancient Greek in declaring that metre is dominated by the number and quantity (duration in time) of the syllables. For the purpose of that somewhat artificial reckoning, syllables are roughly divided into long and short. A long vowel cannot be short, except when it stands before another vowel, but a short vowel becomes long when it is followed by two or more consonants. One long syllable is taken as equivalent to two short syllables. Professor Daniel Jones has reckoned the time-length of such syllables. It is not common for the ratio between long and short in Greek (or in Latin) to be exactly two to one; but the average proportion is not very much greater or less, and the variations, which are hardly slight, must have helped to avoid monotony. How many centuries it may have taken to work out the prosody of Homer and the Greek lyric poets we do not know; but when we meet it, its rules are already complete and suitable to a language which was evenly pronounced and, like French; did not tend to stress individual syllables in speech. The convention is elaborate but it must have satisfied the delicate ear of the Greeks, for at no time and by no race have poets been

more highly valued than by the Greeks, excepting Plato.

I will begin by giving you two specimens of Homeric verse. The one is harsh, blood-curdling, shattering, like its subject—the Cyclopean shambles, and the work of the monster. The other is a scene of war, the intermission of strife during the peace of night. The two together mark two limits of colour between which poetry, and especially epic poetry, can move. Though the rhythm is governed almost exclusively by quantity and number, it is easily seized by our mind and ear; perhaps because we unconsciously tend to stress the first syllable of each foot. But the more we dwell on quantity and the less we import stress, the more nearly we shall catch the native rhythm of these majestic, sonorous, and melodious lines. On the other hand, though the Homeric formula was governed by quantity, stress cannot have been entirely absent or negligible; otherwise, we should not, even rarely, find a short syllable playing the part of a long syllable, when it is pushed into a position of metrical stress. Metrical stress must have had the power to affect quantity in some degree, as at the points marked by * below.

Odyssey. Book IX. 287—295

ὥς ἐφάμην ὃδε μ' οὐδὲν ἀμείβετο νηλεὶ θυμῷ·
 Ἄλλ' ὁ γ' ἀναίξας ἐτάροις ἐπὶ χεῖρας ἱάλλεν
 Σὺν δὲ δύνω μάρψας ὥς τε σκύλακας ποτὶ γαίῃ
 Κόπτ'· ἐκ δ' ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέε, δευὲ δὲ γαίαν.
 Τοὺς δὲ διὰ* μελεῖστί ταμὼν ὀπλίσσατο δόρπον
 Ἐγκατὰ τε* σάρκας τε καὶ ὀστέα μυελόεντα.
 Ἥμεῖς δὲ κλαίοντες ἀνεσχέθομεν Διὶ χεῖρας,
 Σχέτλια ἔργ' ὀρόωντες, ἀμηχανίῃ δ' ἔχε θυμόν.

Iliad. Book VIII. 553—565

Οἱ δὲ μέγα φρονέοντες ἀνὰ πτολεμοιο γεφύρας
 εἶατο παννύχιοι, πυρὰ δέ σφισι καίετο πολλά
 ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἐν οὐρανῷ ἄστρο φαεινὴν ἀμφὶ σελήνην
 φαίνεται ἀριπρεπέα,* ὅτε τ' ἔπλετο νήνεμος αἶθρη,
 πάντα δέ τ' εἶδεται ἄστρο γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα ποιμῆνι
 Τόσσα μεσηγὺ νεῶν ἡδὲ Ξάνθοιο ῥοάων
 Τρώων καιόντων πυρὰ φαίνετο Ἰλιόθι πρό.
 Χίλι' ἄρ' ἐν πεδίῳ πυρὰ καίετο, πὰρ δὲ ἐκάστω
 Εἶατο πεντήκοντα σέλα πυρὸς αἰθομένοιο.
 Ἴπποι δὲ κρὶ λευκὸν ἐρεπτόμενοι καὶ ὀλύρας
 Ἐσταότες παρ' ὄχεσφιν, εὐθρονον ἡῶ μένον.

The sonorous hexametric lines, which the Homerid guilds developed and perpetuated, may have been recited with music *obbligato*; that we can only conjecture. But, soon after the epic tradition had been fully established, what we, following the Greeks, call lyrical verse, came into fashion. The forms, which it took, are many; some suited to an individual reciter, or singer, with his own musical instrument in hand; some to a chorus, with instrumental accompaniment. But the supreme achievement, on the one hand, is the ode—in which Pindar reigned supreme—written for a great assembly collected for sport, but not without a serious and religious atmosphere; and, on the other hand, the choric interludes in dramatic performances, in which the solemn, ritual, or comic dance, was a prominent feature. Of these I can only give a few first-rate examples, beginning with Aristophanes, who was not only a comedian, vigorous, drastic, boisterous, and

often coarse, but also a master of exquisite, delicate, musical verse, as may be seen especially in the *Birds* and the *Clouds*. All this type of poetry is governed by exact metrical rules and patterns, based on *quantity*; infinitely various, but always symmetrical; moulded by the individuality of genius, but on the whole moving towards a greater freedom, delicately reserved. The prosody, established for the recitation of epic poetry, proved easy of adaptation to many other forms.

Aristophanes. *Birds*. 209—222

ἄγε σύννομέ μοι παῦσαι μὲν ὕπνου
 λῦσον δὲ νόμους ἱερῶν ὕμνων
 οἷς διὰ θείου στόματος θρηνεῖς,
 τὸν ἐμὸν καὶ σὸν πολὺδακρυν Ἴτιν
 ἐλελιζομένη διεροῖς μέλεσιν γέννυς ξουθῆς.
 καθαρὰ χωρεῖ διὰ φυλλοκόμου
 σμίλακος ἡχῶ πρὸς Δίος ἔδρας·
 ἴν' ὁ χρυσοκόμας Φοῖβος ἀκούων
 τοῖς σοῖς ἐλεγοῖς ἀντιψάλλων
 ἐλεφαντόδετον φόρμιγγα θεῶν
 ἴστησι χορούς ; διὰ δ' ἀθανάτων
 στομάτων χωρεῖ σύμφωνος ὁμοῦ
 θεία μακάρων ὀλολυγή.

This exquisite piece I had the pleasure of hearing over and over again, sung by Maquay to the music of Hubert Parry, during the rehearsals and performances of the *Birds* in 1883. Maquay had (I hope he still has) a rarely beautiful tenor voice. The passage is worth studying for its masterly rhythmical movement.

With Greek choric poetry one might fill a rich and

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glorious volume. But I will here content myself with one passage of Euripides, in which can be seen the greater freedom after which that poet's creative rhythm strives within the metrical limits which he still follows.

Euripides. *Hippolytus*. 732—741

ἡλιβάτοις ὑπὸ κευθμῶσι γενοίμαν
 ἵνα με πτεροῦσαν ὄρνιν
 θεὸς εἰνὶ ποταναῖς ἀγέλαις θειή·
 ἀρθείην δ' ἐπὶ πόντιον
 κύμα τὰς Ἀδριηνᾶς
 ἀκτᾶς Ἑριδανοῦ θ' ὕδωρ·
 ἔνθα πορφύρεον σταλάσσους'
 εἰς οἶδμα πατρὸς τριτυλαιναί
 κόραι Φαέθοντος οἴκτῳ δακρύων
 τὰς ἠλεκτροφαεῖς αὔγας.

Leaving out of account the Greek epigrammatists, whose rhythmical efforts, wonderful as many of them are, are cramped by their narrow boundaries, there is yet one metrical form which the tragedians and even the comedians of Athens raised to a rare pitch of perfection. Three admirable examples of this measure, used for narrative and dialogue, follow:

Aeschylus. *Agamemnon* (1178—1190)

καὶ μὴν ὁ χρησμὸς οὐκέτ' ἐκ καλυμμάτων
 ἔσται δεδορκῶς νεογάμου νύμφης δίκη·
 λαμπρὸς δ' εἰοικεν ἡλίου πρὸς ἀντολὰς
 πνέων ἐσάξειν, ὥστε κύματος δίκη
 κλύζειν πρὸς αὔγας τοῦδε πήματος πολὺ
 μεῖζον· φρενώσω δ' οὐκέτ' ἐξ αἰνιγμάτων.

.

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την γὰρ στέγην τήνῳ οὐποτ' ἐκλείπει χορὸν
 ξύμφθογγος οὐκ εὐφωνος ; οὐ γὰρ εὖ λέγει.
 καὶ μὴν πεπωκώς γ' ὥς θρασύνεσθαι πλέων
 βρότειον αἶμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει
 δύσπεμπτos ἔξω συγγόνων Ἑρινύων.

Sophocles. *Oedipus at Colonus* (1640-1652)

ὦ παῖδε, τλάσας χρητὸν γενναῖον φρενὶ
 χωρεῖν τόπων ἐκ τῶνδε, μήδ' ἄ μὴ θέμις
 λεύσσειν δικαιοῦν μηδὲ φωνούντων κλύειν.
 ἀλλ' ἔρπεθ' ὥς τάχιστα · πλὴν ὁ κύριος
 Θησεὺς παρέστω μανθάνων τὰ δρώμενα.
 τοσαῦτα φωνήσαντος ἐξηκούσαμεν
 ξύμπαντες ἀστακτὶ δὲ σὺν ταῖς παρθένοις
 στένοντες ὠμαρτοῦμεν. ὥς δ' ἀπήλθομεν
 χρόνῳ βραχεῖ στράφεντες ἐξαπείδομεν
 τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν μὲν οὐδαμοῦ πάροντ' ἔτι,
 ἄνακτα δ' αὐτὸν ὁμμάτων ἐπίσκιον
 χεῖρ' ἀντέχοντα κρατός, ὥς δεινοῦ τινος
 φόβου φάνεντος οὐδ' ἀνασχετοῦ βλέπειν.

Euripedes. *Bacchae* (1051-1094)

ἦν δ' ἄγχος ἀμφίκρημον, ὕδασι διαβροχόν,
 πεύκαισι συσκιάζον, ἔνθα Μαίναδες
 καθήντ' ἔχουσαι χεῖρας ἐν τέρπνοις πόνοις.
 αἱ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν θύρσον ἐκλελοιπότα
 κίσσῳ κομήτην αὐθις ἐξάνεστεφον,
 αἱ δ' ἐκλιπούσαι ποικίλ' ὥς πῶλοι ζιγὰ
 βακχεῖον ἀντέκλαζον ἀλλήλαις μέλος.

* * * * *

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. . . Dionysus disguised as a stranger, at the prayer of Pentheus, puts him aloft to see the secret rites . . .

λαβὼν γὰρ ἐλάτης οὐράνιον ἄκρον κλάδον
κατήγεν, ἦγεν, ἦγεν ἐς μέλαν πέδον ·
κυκλοῦτο δ' ὥστε τόξον ἢ κυρτὸς τροχὸς
τόρνῳ γραφόμενος περιφορὰν ἔλκει δρόμον.
Πενθέα δ' ἰδρύσας ἐλατίνων ὄζων ἔπι,
ὄρθον μεθίει διὰ χερῶν βλάστημ' ἄνω
ὑτρέμα, φυλίσσων μὴ ἀναχαιτίσειε νιν.

* * * * *

σίγησε δ' αἶθρη, σῦγα δ' ὕλιμος νάπη
φυλλ' εἶχε, θήρων δ' οὐκ ἂν ἤκουσας βοήν.
αἱ δ' ὥσιν ἤχῃν οὐ σαφῶς δεδεγμέναι
ἔστησαν ὄρθαι καὶ διήνεγκαν κόρας.
ὁ δ' αὖθις ἐπέκλειυσεν · ὥς δ' ἐγνώρισαν
σαφῇ κελευσμὸν βακχίου Κάδμου κόραι,
ἤξαν πελειᾶς ὠκύτητ' οὐκ ἤσσανες
πύδων ἔχουσαι συντόνοιςδρομήμασι
μήτηρ Ἀγαυή συγγονοὶ θ' ὁμόσποροι
πᾶσαι τε βιάχαι · διὰ δὲ χειμάρρου νάπης
ἀγμῶν τ' ἐπήδων θεοῦ πνοαῖσιν ἐμμανεῖς.

In the last line before the row of asterisks the long vowel is not elided but coalesces with the following short vowel.

This metre, of six feet, with a movable cæsure, either in the middle of the third foot or the middle of the fourth foot, sharply illustrates the difference between the quantity rhythm and the stress rhythm, if we compare it with archaic examples of English Alexandrines

(e.g. Drayton, p. 27). When I was coaching undergraduates for Greek plays, I was maddened by some who turned this measure into doggerel, by laying a brutal pressure on the second syllable of every foot as indicated by underlining in the following verse:

ὦ τέκνα Κάδμου τοῦ πάλαι νέα τρόφῃ

A comparison of Chapman, pp. 22, 27, with Shakespeare, pp. 37—42, shows how English poets learnt to dominate the system of stresses, from which the Germans have never escaped.

B. Greek Metres and the Latin Languages

The next experiments in skilled versification that have come down to us are those of the Latins. We know nothing of their native versification, though they had some; and we are tempted to believe that they timed their earlier attempts at verse by stress, but that cannot be proved. At any rate, when they began to borrow culture and popular comedies from the Greeks, and even adopted the Greek verse of six feet for their dramatic dialogue, what kind of curious mess Plautus and Terence, with all their mastery of Latin, made of that delicate measure, many of my readers already know, and those who wish to know can learn in fullest detail from Professor W. M. Lindsay's book on *Early Latin Verse*.

But the most interesting development came in the time of Cicero, when Greek culture had really been domesticated in the best circles of Rome. Romans then felt driven to use the Greek hexameters and the

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Greek lyrics, both invented, as I have told you and I hope you believe, for a language that had practically no important stresses. The Latins then adopted these metres, and adapted them, to our astonishment, with admirable success.

Listen* to Cicero's translation from Homer. Not so bad for a man whose real vocation was for prose composition and oratory.

Odyssey XII. 184—191

O decus Argolicum, quin puppim flectis, Ulixé,
Auribus ut nostros possis cognoscere cantus?
Nam nemo haec unquam est transvectus caerula
cursu

Quin prius astiterit vocum ducedine captus;
Post, variis avido satiatus pectore musis,
Doctior ad patrias lapsus pervenerit oras.
Nos grave certamen belli clademque tenemus,
Graecia quam Troiae divino numine vexit;
Omniaque e latis rerum vestigia terris.

But now let us take this, a hundred per cent better.

Lucretius

Tu, pater, es rerum inventor, tu patria nobis
Suppeditas praecepta, tuisque ex, inclute, cartis,
Floriferis ut apes in saltibus omnia libant,
Omnia nos itidem depascimur aurea dicta,
Aurea, perpetua semper dignissima vita.

* Here and elsewhere, advisedly, I say "listen." It is possible to listen with the inward ear of solitude—if it were not so, poetry would lose half its virtue to the solitary reader.

Nam simul ac ratio tua coepit vociferari
 Naturam rerum, divina mente coorta,
 Diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi
 Discedunt, totum video per inane geri res.
 Apparet divom numen sedesque quietae
 Quas neque concutiunt venti, nec nubila nimbis
 Aspergunt neque nix acri concreta pruina
 Cana cadens violat, semperque innubilis aether
 Integrit et large diffuso lumine ridet.

And then this—perfect, having regard to the fact that the mode—quantitative verse—was not invented for the Latin language.

Virgil

Ipsē cava solans aegrum testudine amorem
 Te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum,
 Te veniente die, te decedente canebat.
 Taenarias etiam fauces, alta ostia Ditis,
 Et caligantem nigra formidine lucum
 Ingressus, manisque adiit, regemque tremendum
 Nesciaque humanis precibus mansuescere corda.
 At cantu commotae Erebi de sedibus imis
 Umbrae ibant tenues simulacraque luce carentum;
 Quam multa in foliis avium se milia condunt
 Vesper ubi aut hibernus agit de montibus imber,
 Matres atque viri defunctaque corpora vita
 Magnanimum heroum, pueri innuptaeque puellae,
 Impositique rogis iuvenes ante ora parentum,
 Quos circum limus niger et deformis harundo
 Cocyti tardaque palus inamabilis unda
 Alligat et noviens Styx interfusa coeracet.

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Then let us turn to the lyrists, Horace and Catullus. The metres are Greek, but the Latin artists have adapted them to their own language. The rhythm is inevitably different, but the result is technically not far from perfect. The Latin stresses, which no doubt were heavier than those in Greek, are accommodated to the Greek metrical system. The elisions, which are natural to Greek, are "managed" in Latin, no doubt by a slur, though some of the short vowels may have been actually elided—the Latins, unlike the Greeks, elided, or pretended to elide, long vowels.

Catullus

Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus
Rumoresque senum severiorum
Omnes unius aestimemus assis—
Soles occidere et redire possunt,
Nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux,
Nox est perpetua una dormienda.

Horace

Festo quid potius die
Neptuni faciam? Prome reconditum,
Lyde, strenua Caecubum
Munitaeque adhibe vim sapientiae.

Inclinare meridiem
Sentis, ac veluti stet volucris dies,
Parcis deripere horreo
Cessantem Bibuli consulis amphoram.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

Nos cantabimus invicem
Neptunum et virides Nereidum comas.
Tu curva recines lyra
Latonam et celeris spicula Cynthiae;
Summo carmine quae Cnidon
Fulgentesque tenet Cycladas, et Paphon
Iunctis visit oloribus;
Dicetur merita Nox quoque nenia.

But the old stress habit of the Latin came back in the dark ages when the new peoples and their Christian priests used the Latin tongue in accordance with its own inclination to stress and their own more fundamental habit of stress, and introduced rhymes from their own primeval armoury.

Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvat saeculum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla.

Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando iudex est venturus
Cuncta stricte discussurus.

Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulcra regionum
Coget omnes ante thronum.

Mors stupebit et natura
Cum resurget creatura
Judicanti responsura.

The above is probably not very old, but the technique

THE LATINS

had been worked up through centuries during which the congenital habit of the Latin language had re-asserted itself. And thus we come at length to the marvellous weight, solemn music, majestic movement, and profound content of Dante Alighieri. In his hands stress, quantity, and number, melt into an infinitely variable and harmonious rhythm. The artificial units of Greek prosody have been entirely forgotten.

Dante. *Inferno*

Per me si va nella città dolente,
Per me si va nell'eterno dolore,
Per me si va tra la perduta gente.
Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore,
Fecemi la divina potestate,
La somma sapienza e il primo amore;
Dinanzi a me non fur cose create
Se non eterne; ed io eterno duro.
Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate.

Note the elisions, in which the open vowel is not suppressed but coalesces. It seems likely that the Latin elisions, or some of them, were similar in character.

To sum up: the Greek rhythm takes note of the number of syllables and the length of syllables. The arbitrary rule that a long syllable is the equivalent of two short syllables seems to aim at unpleasing uniformity, but the nature of the Greek language provided abundant variety within the limits of the rule. The Latin poets partly adopted the alien prosody and, in so doing, did some violence to the fundamental character of their own tongue; but their consummate skill and

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fine sense of rhythm brought ultimate success to their unpromising efforts. They were also helped by the many Greek words, which they embodied in their language. But those who know the Sapphics of Sappho, and the Alcaics of Alcæus will agree that the Latin measures bearing those names, however elegant, are something quite different.

CHAPTER II

ENGLISH RHYTHMS.

A. Primitive Stress and Rhythms.

Now I come to the real centre of my subject. English poetry starts, like that of many Nordic languages, with a stress system holding together a varying number of syllabic units, and almost savagely adorned by alliteration. Later we get what is known as the "fourteener"—originally a fifteener as in the *Ormulum* (A.D. 1200). "Now, brother Wálder, bróther mín after the fléshes kindé/ And bróther mín in Chrístendóm through fúlluht ánd through tróthé," etc. In this earliest form every long line had a weak ending, and therefore fifteen syllables. When the final E became E mute and then vanished, the line became a true fourteener. With pairs of alternating rhymes this becomes the metre that is known to hymnologists as "common measure." With single rhymes it is the metre of John Gilpin and of Chapman's *Iliad*, and of such hymns as "Praise to the hóliest ín the heíght, And ín the dépth be práise."

The following is a very favourable specimen of Chapman's work.

Chapman, *Iliad VIII*; end.

As when about the silver moon, when all is free from
 wind,
 And stars shine clear to whose sweet beams high
 prospects and the brows
 Of all steep hills and pinnacles thrust up themselves for
 shows.
 And even the lowly valleys joy to glitter in their
 sight,
 When the unmeasured firmament bursts to disclose her
 light,
 And all the signs in heaven are seen, that glad the
 shepherd's heart;
 So many fires disclosed their beams, made by the
 Trojan part,
 Before the face of Ilion, and her bright turrets showed.
 A thousand courts of guard kept fires and every guard
 allowed
 Fifty stout men by whom their horse eat oats and hard
 white corn
 And all did wishfully expect the silver-thronèd
 morn.

This is a translation of the passage from the *Iliad* quoted above (p. 9), one of the most admired short sketches in that poem. Lord Derby's translation of it is famous. Tennyson also gave us a delicate rendering, and it seems to have spurred Chapman to his highest flight. But it is an arid metre, the fourteener. It will be observed that alliteration has vanished, that over-running from couplet to couplet is freely used, and that

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each pair of fourteeners rhymes. But how Keats managed to feel the magic of Homer through Chapman's version, which is for the most part very commonplace doggerel, it is hard to understand.

B. French Influence on English Speech.

However, I am hurrying forward too fast. With or without rhyme, with or without alliteration, we never could have got far with this *titúm titúm titúm* metre, or its relative the *túm-ti túm-ti túm*. Between the Ormulum (about 1200) and the Elizabethan age, an enormous revolution took place in English speech and—more important to us—in English verse. The change in English speech came from the blending of Norman French with English; this blending had proceeded throughout 300 years when Chaucer began to write; and Chaucer, the poet of the court but also of the people, adapted the fortunate cross-breed to metres which were themselves partly of foreign invention. In Chaucer we feel that the crudely-stressed English of the Ormulum and the popular ballads has been organically welded with the lightly-stressed French speech. French verse, as all who deserve to read it know, carries its rhythm without crude emphasis; it has syllables of every kind of quantity at the pleasure of the speaker, ghost-like E mutes by rule at the end of each alternate couplet, and unaccented E's—silent in modern speech—still counting in modern verse. Owing to the happy marriage of English and French we English have been able ever since Chaucer

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to play freely with our words in poetry, to disregard or shift our stresses almost at will, to lengthen or shorten within limits any syllable; in short to use, not only the rich vocabulary of two languages, French and English, but also at our choice the stresses of the Anglo-Saxon habit of speech or the even pressure of the Gallic, and thus to open the way for the delicate and elusive rhythms which Shakespeare perfected in his own lifetime and Milton yet further developed in harmony with his more austere temperament. To illustrate what I say of the rhythms of French verse, I ask you to study these exquisitely modelled lines of Racine, which owe all to their art and little to their content.

Racine

Aux portes de Trézène, et parmi ces tombeaux,
Des princes de ma race antiques sepultures,
Est un temple sacré, formidable aux parjures:
C'est là que les mortels n'osent jurer en vain;
Le perfide y reçoit un châtiment soudain;
Et, craignant d'y trouver la mort inévitable,
Le mensonge n'a point de frein plus redoutable.
Là, si vous m'en croyez, d'un amour éternel
Nous irons confirmer le serment solennel.
Nous prendrons à témoin le dieu qu'on y révère:
Nous le prions tous deux de nous servir de père.
Des dieux les plus sacrés j'attesterai le nom;
Et la chaste Diane, et l'auguste Junon,
Et tous les dieux enfin, témoins de mes tendresses,
Garantiront la foi de mes saintes promesses.

CHAUCER

Although every line has a fixed cæsura, although every alternate couplet ends with a ghostlike E mute, although the E's, which are dead in speech, still count in verse, although up to the nineteenth century it was forbidden to overrun a phrase from line to line, the liberty of rhythm remains. You cannot scan the lines, but each has its own music and its own rhythm. Each obeys some unwritten, some indefinable, some invisible laws. In English we have borrowed from the French something of their freedom in lengthening or shortening our syllables, in pressing, sparing, or even shifting our stresses. That gives our great poets the liberty of which they make such admirable use.

Take the following from Chaucer as a fine example; not the finest that could be found, perhaps, but near the highest level, even of this great poet. A few strange words, a few odd spellings, a little difficulty in timing the lines because the final E's are generally sounded, make Chaucer hard; but his difficulties soon vanish, and his supreme mastery comes to full light. Since his day every great English poet has trodden the path which Chaucer first blazed.

Knichtes Tale. 1116-1136

First on the wal was peynted a foreste
In which ther dwelleth neither man or beste,
With knotty, knarry, bareyne trees olde
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to beholde;
In which ther ran a swymbol and a swough,
As though a storme sholde bresten every bough.
And downward from an hill, under a bent,

Ther stood the temple of Mars armipotent,
 Wrought al of burned steel, of which thentree
 Was long and streit and ghasly for to see.
 And therout cam a rage and swich a vese (blast)
 That it made all the gates for to rese (shake).
 The northern light in at the dores shoon,
 For windows on the wal ne was ther noon,
 Through which men mighten any light descerne.
 The dores were alle of adamant eterne
 Y-clenched overthwart and endelong
 With iren tough; and, for to make it strong,
 Every piler, the temple to sustene,
 Was tonne-great, of iren bright and shene.

Note the astounding vigour and admirable restraint of this passage. That the original enunciation of English had been modified by its blending with French by the time of Chaucer seems hardly doubtful, but my attention was drawn to this modification of our tongue by a hint from that great scholar, Sir William McCormick, whose loss not only his friends but all lovers of Chaucer have reason to deplore. The passage is not long enough to prove the point, but those who know Chaucer can hardly fail to agree that the freedom with which that poet handles the heroic couplet is at least as great as Marlowe ever attained in his blank verse, and almost as great as Shakespeare had won in his own until his middle life was passed.

In his *Odyssey*, Chapman used the ten-syllable rhyming couplet, but in my judgment without great success. Drayton in his *Polyolbion* used Alexandrines.

Chapman, *Odyssey XII*, 184-191

Ulysses, stay thy ship, and that song hear,
 That none passed ever but it bent his ear,
 But left him ravished, and instructed more
 By us, than any ever heard before.
 For we know all things whatsoever were
 In wide Troy laboured; whatsoever there
 The Grecians and the Trojans both sustained
 By those high issues that the Gods ordained.
 And whatsoever all the earth can show
 T' inform a knowledge of desert, we know.

This is the song of the Sirens, the same passage of which I gave Cicero's translation above. There is not much to choose between Chapman's "heroic couplets" and his fourteeners. But I daresay both gave a lift to English poetry. Anyhow, the heroic couplet came into its own with Dryden and Pope later.

Alexandrines never caught hold in England for any length of time. It would be interesting to seek for reasons why the Alexandrine suits the French genius and language, and has never held the English fancy. Though Drayton's patriotic poem has merit and interest, his versification was fortunately never accepted as a model.

Drayton: *Polyolbion*.

Fight between Corin and Gogmagog.

All doubtful to which part / the victory would go,
 Upon that lofty place / at Plimmouth called the Hoe,
 These mighty masters met; / with many an ireful look

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Who threatened, as the one / hold of the other took;
But, grappled, glowing fire / shines in their sparkling
 eyes.
And, while at length of arm / one from the other lies,
Their lusty sinews swell / like cables, as they strive:
Their feet such trampling make / as though they
 forced to drive
A thunder out of earth, / which staggered with the
 weight:
Thus, either's utmost force / urged to the greatest
 height,
While one upon his hip / the other seeks to lift,
And th' adverse, by a turn, / doth from his cunning
 shift,
Their short-fetcht troubled breath / a hollow noise
 doth make
Like bellows of a forge.

It is worth while to notice that this artist, although rough and uncouth, accepts without hesitation overrunning between the verses, which the French, with their more delicate although constrained sense of rhythm, have only in the last century learnt to accept (*enjambement*). English, whether because of its natural freedom of movement, or because of the English dislike of unnecessary discipline, fell early into the system of overrunning from line to line. But the liberty of English verse was won when for narrative and dramatic poetry the ten-syllable blank verse was adopted with the freest possible construction of every line and liberal running-over from line to line. Good reasons might be given for the belief that our great English lyric poets, of

THE LIBERTY OF ENGLISH

whom out of a hundred there is only room to mention for honour's sake John Keats and Robert Bridges, owe the grace and ease of their exquisite and incalculable rhythms to the masterly and masterful experiments and example of William Shakespeare. They followed no Pindaric scheme, they assumed no Hellenic fetters, even if some of them were apt to call their inspired effusions "Pindaric Odes." Though Dryden and Pope afterwards brought chains into fashion and marched or danced in them with marvellous ease and dexterity, a greater than they, John Milton, accepted the English blank verse and gave it his own majestic and sonorous impress. Some of us may think that our great Robert Bridges was wasting his time when he endeavoured to codify the Miltonic practice, and even almost to condemn the master when in his later years he claimed for himself still greater freedom. Under what rule of quantities or stresses can we bring that fine verse of Milton, "Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death"? Those who count stresses in a blank verse and say that there may be five, there may be three, but on the average there must be four, have already denied any absolute rule. In the above line it is difficult to admit less than eight stresses, and yet we must be glad that Milton wrote it. It leads up to the climax of a masterly description, and in my estimation it is a rugged and irregular jewel which gives special character to a noble passage.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

RHYME

For the sake of completeness a word must be said about rhyme. Rhyme has, strictly speaking, nothing to do with rhythm. It may be used to supply the studs that hold together the units of rhythm which form a particular pattern. But rhythm can do without rhyme. The Greeks and the Latins following the Greeks did without it—though the Latins sometimes fell into rhyme, perhaps not unwillingly; and in the middle ages they adopted the so-called “Leonine” hexameters, which have internal rhymes. But on our English Parnassus, since the genius of our race, working through Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and their glorious successors, has freed our rhythms from all artificial bonds, our poets—and heaven bless them for it—have often chosen to weave their choicest words and thoughts into appropriate patterns, simple or complex, to please their own mind and their hearers. Such poems—to take only two—as Gray’s *Elegy* and Keats’ *Ode to the Nightingale*, within their patterns move as freely for their rhythms as blank verse, but their patterns perhaps need the rhymes to bind the whole together.

C. The Eclipse and the New Burst of Light.

Chaucer at his death had set English poetry, and especially the rhythm of English poetry, on a plane which it did not again reach for more than a hundred years. The fifteenth century was a disastrous century

THE ECLIPSE OF POETRY

for England. The French wars, though at first successful, taxed English wealth and energy, and diverted attention from the arts of peace. When fortune had turned and the English were bereft of glory and reward, there followed the disastrous feuds of Lancaster and York. Poetry is a luxury and does not often thrive in poor surroundings; still less is it encouraged by disorder and depression. It was not until the days of Henry VIII that poetry began to lift her head again.

But during this eclipse of song English courtly prose was being developed by Malory, drawing from French sources as Chaucer had worked after French and Italian models; and before Chaucer was dead the great English translators of the Bible had begun their work, which was not completed until the Authorised Version was promulgated in 1611. The rhythms of prose differ from those of poetry, but the materials used by both arts are the same; the words, the phrases, and the cadences developed and refined by the English translators of the Bible, have gone to swell the resources of our poets, and have added music to their rhythm throughout four centuries and more. Much also do our poets owe to Cranmer, whose loving care and diligent skill gave us the wonderful rhythms of our Prayer Book. Take only that transcendent masterpiece in which the solemn ritual of our mysterious Communion service culminates: "Therefore with angels and arch-angels, and with all the company of Heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious name: evermore praising Thee and saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts; Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory: Glory be to Thee, O Lord most high." No verse could be more

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musical or more sonorous, or present a more harmonious unit of rhythm.

In the reign of Henry VIII courtly poetry again became fashionable. Wyatt (d. 1542) introduced the sonnet to our English measures, and used the *terza rima* for his satires. Surrey (d. 1547) is said to have been the first to write blank verse in English. Both poets were under Italian influence, and both contributed to the progress of rhythmic art, but it was for Spenser to mark the highest limit of this delicate and artificial type of verse, though Philip Sidney was not far behind. It is interesting to note that Spenser's nine-line stanza is based in metre and scheme of rhymes on Chaucer's *Monk's Tale*, with the addition of an Alexandrine in the ninth place. Thus is proved the continuity of tradition in spite of interruption.

Faerie Queene. Canto V.

The noble hart that harbours vertuous thought
And is with childe of glorious great intent
Can never rest, until it forth have brought
Th' eternal brood of glorie excellent.
Such restless passion did all night torment
The passing corage of that Faery Knight
Devizing how that doughtie tournament
With greatest honour he achieven might.
Still did he wake and still did watch for dawning light.

At last the golden Oriental gate
Of greatest heaven gae to open fayre;
And Phœbus, fresh as brydgroome to his mate,
Came dawning forth, shaking his deawie hayre

THE REVIVAL

And hurls his glistring beams through gloomy ayre.
Which when the wakeful Elfe perceiv'd, straightway
He started up and did himselfe prepayre
In sunbright armes and battallous array:
For with that Pagan proud he combatt will that day.

And forth he comes into the commune hall;
Where earely waite him many a gazing eye
To meet what end to straunger knights may fall.
There many minstrells maken melody
To drive away the dull melancholy:
And many Bardes, that to the trembling chord
Can tune their timely voices cunningly;
And many Chroniclers, that can record
Old loves, and warres for Ladies doen by many a
Lord.

Spenser. *Prothalamion*.

There in a meadow by the river's side
A flock of nymphs I chanced to espy,
All lovely daughters of the flood thereby,
With goodly greenish locks all loose untied
As each had been a bride;
And each one had a little wicker basket
In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket,
And with fine fingers cropt full feateously
The tender stalks on high.
Of every sort which in that meadow grew
They gathered some; the violet, pallid blue,
The little daisy that at evening closes,
The virgin lily and the primrose true.

With store of vermeil roses,
To deck their bridegrooms' posies,
Against the bridal day, which was not long.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.

Though the metre of this exquisite poem does not display great variety, the rhythms have a very pleasing movement.

D. The Evolution of Rhythm first for Epic and Dramatic Purposes.

The generation that came to maturity in 1590 and passed its prime by 1620 conceived, perfected, and established in all essentials, the method, canons, and instinctive handling of rhythm in English poetry. It would seem that a great poetic people has first to establish its main mode of poetic expression for narrative or drama—that is for the two modes that have the greatest popular appeal—and then from the canons and devices so invented and standardised the lyric and other artists will draw such elements as suit their purpose, and adapt them to the schemes fashioned by their individual impulse. In Greece the Homerid guilds fixed the firm but free principles of quantitative rhythm; the lyric poets in their turn adopted those rules and used them for the weaving of their own varied patterns; even the dramatic trimeter is framed according to those principles of prosody, and may be taken rather as a derivative than as a new invention. There is nothing revolutionary even in Theocritus or Herondas.

THE GREAT AGE

The Latins, of course, adapted the Greek system of prosody to their own language; after unsuccessful attempts had been made with the dramatic trimeter, Lucretius and Catullus at very nearly the same time succeeded, the one in the epic measure, the other in the lyric forms; Horace and Martial wrote neat trimeters. But, when the Italian tongue came into its very own, the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri fixed the language and the handling of its rhythms for his successors.

In France there can be no doubt that, after the elaboration of the Alexandrine couplet for narrative and dramatic poetry, its artificial prosody influenced, if it did not entirely control, the French lyrists.

E. The Importance of 1590-1620 in England.

Similarly in England, the crucial time in the fixing of our rhythmic habit and aspiration is the early development of the heroic couplet, and its gradual supersession by blank verse for dramatic and narrative purposes. While Spenser was elaborating his slightly archaic phrases, and his delicate rhythms, which for all their beauty do not quite satisfy, Marlowe and Shakespeare were working out the rhymed couplet first, but also—more important—the blank verse of ten syllables. The elastic movement which Marlowe initiated, and which was developed by Shakespeare throughout more than twenty years, culminated in a poetic mode in which you can find no rule that cannot be broken, no chains to fetter the harmony, and yet a living and ordered symmetry. This intangible prosody, offering unlimited

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possibilities to genius, this artless art, this truly free verse, has given not only to Milton and to other masters of dramatic and epic poetry, but also to our golden chorus of lyric poets, such inimitable music as cannot be defined and analysed but can only be accepted with joy and reverence.

F. The Evolution of Blank Verse.

Marlowe died before he was thirty. His was an exuberant and undisciplined nature: one cannot say whether at the time of his death he had reached his limit, or whether there might have been more and better to come. It is certain that he left much for Shakespeare to do.

This is probably the best-known passage of Marlowe; I have striven in vain to find a better. Its merits speak for themselves.

Marlowe. *Faustus.*

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships
And burst the topless towers of Ilion?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.
Her lips suck forth my soul! see where it flies;
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heav'n is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.

Oh, thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter,
When he appeared to hapless Semele;

THE PROGRESS OF SHAKESPEARE

More lovely than the monarch of the sky,
In wanton Arethusa's azure arms;
And none but thou shalt be my paramour.

But it is only a step on the ascent, which Shakespeare was left to climb alone. Each line is a unit, and the rhythm is in consequence rather monotonous, in spite of the wonderful flow of words. Nor does it escape that ti-tum, ti-tum movement which English inherited by its Teutonic parentage, but which was fortunately corrected by the strong French blend in our culture and our speech. Except in five places in the above passage, mostly in the first foot of a line, the accent falls uniformly on the second syllable of each foot, and there are five regular stresses in every line. It is from this point that Shakespeare began to move forward, although for some time he did not abandon the rhymed couplet, which creates a pleasing diversity, but at the same time tends to check the free development of rhythm.

The Progress of Shakespeare.

The gentle oscillation of the following lines contrasts with the rapturous fervour of *Faustus*, but the rhythm is not essentially more free, though the texture and music of the words show a far higher range of mastery than Marlowe attained.

Two Gentlemen of Verona. II, 7.

JULIA: The current that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou knowst, being stopt, impatiently doth rage;
But, when his fair course is not hindered,

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He makes fair music with the enamelled stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage;
And so by many winding nooks he strays,
With willing sport, to the wild ocean.
Then let me go, and hinder not my course;
I'll be as patient as a gentle stream
And make a pastime of each weary step,
Till the last step have brought me to my love;
And there I'll rest, as after much turmoil,
A blessed soul doth in Elysium.

In *Romeo and Juliet* the passion rises higher, the tenderness is even more delicate, but the rhythms are much as in the *Two Gentlemen*.

Is it fanciful to suggest that in the next extract there is a definite advance? The rhythm is more varied, the accent falls with studied freedom. (Such words as "inversion," and "resolution," are out of place; they suggest that rules have been broken, whereas it is only monotony that has been avoided, at any rate where this master is at work.)

Midsummer Night's Dream. II, 2.

But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beam of the watery moon;
And the imperial votaress passed on
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
Yet marked I where the shaft of Cupid fell.
It fell upon a little western flower,—
Before, milk-white, now purple with Love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness.

SHAKESPEARE

In another passage from *Midsummer Night's Dream*, given below, our wizard returns to rhyme once more, but it does not hamper his rhythm. The first line is a masterpiece; it has only nine syllables. I make in it five stresses, of which three are on the last three words. How easy to have written "whereon" instead of "where"! But that little change would ruin the magical effect. All four lines are worth study for the delicate variations which modulate the rhythm.

Midsummer Night's Dream. II, 3.

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows;
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.

Another passage from *The Merchant of Venice*, Act V, Sc. I: I need no excuse if most of the passages that I choose should be very familiar. Shakespeare has been closely studied for at least two hundred years, and not all of his critics have been duffers. Moreover, where I have a point or points to illustrate, the passage I choose will be one which I consider worthy of close study; but I have no desire to repudiate the certificate: "Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus." In fact, if the *pium vulgus* agree with my choice, I shall regard it as a compliment rather than otherwise.

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!	4
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music	5
Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night,	4

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Become the touches of sweet harmony.	4
Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven	5
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold.	4
There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st	3
But in his motion like an angel sings,	3
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubims.	3
Such harmony is in immortal souls;	3
But, whilst the muddy vesture of decay	4
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.	4

The Merchant of Venice, v. i.

It seems shameful to submit such a jewel to analysis. But there is comfort in the thought that when we have had our wicked will with it the jewel will be none the worse.

The passage may first be used to illustrate the stress-test in blank verse. The importance of this test for our immediate purpose is that it tends to confirm the view that the best of English verse confutes, on intelligent examination, Omond's judgement, that English verse is *dominated* by stress, which is "more powerful and rigid in English than in any other European language."

The number of stresses that may be reckoned as effective in each line is noted in the margin. They vary from three to five; the average is exactly four. If other people read the passage otherwise, the results will no doubt be different. But, if the passage can be read by intelligent and sympathetic readers in different ways, then that fact confirms the view that rhythm in English verse is not *governed* by any pre-imposed and ineluctable stresses. The effective stresses depend upon the reader, who interprets the poet's intention. They are not pre-

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ordained. If the poet were available, his judgement would be conclusive. But it is inconceivable that he can have intended these lines to be read so that they contained five feet, each with a stress on the second syllable, with an occasional "inversion" or "resolution."

Rather we can imagine him saying: "Yes, there are about ten syllables in each of my lines. I know that there are stresses and quantities; I dispose them as I think best, in order to suit the rhythm, quality, texture, and music of my words. The order, position, and succession of stresses and quantities hover around a norm, but are seldom identical with that norm. The total effect is the product of my art, which I could not even myself reduce to law. If you don't like my ways, and think I ought to be more orderly, I am sorry; but I feel that our English language is very flexible, and I believe that it will stand a good deal of pulling about. I simply could not begin to write, if there were some pedant who prescribed the rules by which I should work. Moreover, I believe that every artist recognises some qualities in his material which govern his use of them; those he respects; but, unless his material can be moulded to his will—within satisfactory limits—he will abandon that material, and follow some other art. I believe that there are other languages, of which I know little or nothing; they will have other properties, which their poets have learnt to manage; for my own part, I am well satisfied with my own, which does almost anything I wish it to do."

I might go on for ever, but will conclude with that passage in which Shakespeare's magic act reaches its culmination. It comes appropriately in that play in

which Prospero, the magician, (shall we say, the poet's dramatic impersonation?), intimates his intention

"to break his staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,
To drown his book."

Henry VIII was published after the *Tempest*; but *Henry VIII* was not all Shakespeare's work; and Shakespeare's share in that play may have been written before the *Tempest*. If so, the poet did "break his staff," after he had completed this work.

Tempest. IV, i.

These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And like the baseless fabric of their vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Surely the rhythm here is supreme in its perfection. But we may turn for a moment to a point of texture—the choice of words. He starts *piano*, and uses short, light English words, but smoothly compacted, not

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staccato. As the *crescendo* works towards the climax, the heavier, the more sonorous, the foreign words come in. Then, as the emotion subsides, the little English words close the period, like gentle ripples after a storm. For the benefit of those who count stresses, it may be pointed out that there is one perfectly good line in this matchless passage which has only two stresses.

I had the curiosity to look up the German translation. Very good, but it made me thank God for our English language. Note, in the German which follows, the inevitability of an alternate stress.

Tempest. IV, i.

Unsre Spieler,
Wie ich euch sagte, waren Geister, und
Sind aufgelöst in Luft, in dünne Luft.
Wie dieses Scheines lockrer Bau, so werden
Die wolkenhohen Thürme, die Paläste,
Die hehren Tempel, selbst der grosse Ball,
Ja, was daran nur Theil hat, untergehn;
Und, wie dies leere Schaugepräng erblasst,
Spurlos verschwinden. Wir sind solches Zeug
Als der zu Träumen, und dies kleine Leben
Umfasst ein Schlaf.

In the *Tempest* our poet gives us also a peerless lyric—in rhythm, as in conception and texture. Note the bold alliteration in the first line with F, and later the recurrent S—soothing, fairy letters.

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Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell;
Hark now I hear them,—
Ding, dong, bell.

One more specimen from another giant; not so delicate, not so perfect, but showing another type of rhythm; noble, forceful, harsh, with its own grim beauty—from Belial's speech, *Paradise Lost*, Book II.

What if the breath that kindled those grim fires,
Awaked, should blow them into sevenfold rage,
And plunge us in the flames? or from above
Should intermitted vengeance arm again
His red right hand to plague us? What, if all
Her stores were open'd, and this firmament
Of hell should spout her cataracts of fire,
Impendent horrors, threatening hideous fall
One day upon our heads: while we, perhaps
Designing or exhorting glorious war,
Caught in a fiery tempest shall be hurl'd
Each on his rock transfixed, the sport and prey
Of racking whirlwinds; or for ever sunk
Under yon boiling ocean, wrapt in chains;
There to converse with everlasting groans,
Unrespited, unpitied, unrelieved,
Ages of hopeless end? This would be worse.

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Criticism, analysis, the grammar of rhythm, are out of place in the presence of such majesty.

G. The Followers of Shakespeare.

Here follow a few examples (from the Elizabethan Song-book) of the lyrics based upon the Shakespearean blending of quantity, stress, number and magic into rhythm. Not a doubt that even that great master, John Milton, owed much to "fancy's child" and his "wood notes wild." Was Shakespeare's art so great that he hid it even from Milton? Yet Milton, though he seems rather patronising, acknowledges the charm of Shakespeare; not however his own debt. Nevertheless, one can but wonder whether any of the following would have been written as they were written, had not Shakespeare first shown the way: the infinitely varied way.

John Fletcher.

Hence all you vain delights,
As short as are the nights
Wherein you spend your folly:
There's nought in this life sweet,
If men were wise to see it,
But only melancholy,
Oh, sweetest melancholy!
Welcome, folded arms and fixed eyes,
A sight that piercing mortifies,
A look that's fastened to the ground,
A tongue chained up without a sound.

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Fountain heads and pathless groves,
Places which pale passion loves!
Moonlight walks, when all the fowls
Are warmly housed, save bats and owls!
 A midnight bell, a parting groan,
 These are the sounds we fed upon:
Then stretch our bones in a still gloomy valley.
Nothing's so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy.

John Fletcher.

Orpheus with his lute made trees,
And the mountain-tops that freeze,
 Bow themselves when he did sing;
To his music plants and flowers
Ever sprung; as sun and showers
 There had made a lasting spring.
Everything that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
 Hung their heads, and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
 Fall asleep or, hearing, die.

James Shirley.

The glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things.
There is no armour against Fate;
 Death lays his icy hand on kings:
 Sceptre and crown
 Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade.

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Some men with swords may reap the field,
And plant fresh laurels where they kill;
But their strong nerves at last must yield;
They tame but one another still:
Early or late
They stoop to fate
And must give up their murmuring breath
When they, pale captives, creep to death.
The garlands wither on your brow.
Then boast no more your mighty deeds!
Upon death's purple altar now
See where the victor-victim bleeds.
Your heads must come
To the cold tomb.
Only the actions of the just
Smell sweet, and blossom in their dust.

John Milton.

Sweet echo, sweetest nymph, that liv'st unseen
Within thy airy shell
By slow Meander's margent green
And in the violet-embroidered vale
Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well;
Can'st thou not tell me of a gentle pair
That liketh thy Narcissus are?
Oh! if thou have
Hid them in some flowery cave,
Tell me but where,
Sweet queen of parley, daughter of the sphere.
So may'st thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding praise to all heaven's harmonies.

CHAPTER III

STRESS AND QUANTITY

A. Rhythm in German: a Contrast.

OF the purely Teutonic languages, past and living, modern High German has attained the highest level in rhythmical achievement. It is comparable with English in its cultural standard and its technical development. But, being practically unaffected by any foreign admixture, it illustrates most tellingly the fetters we in England have broken, the freedom we have by good fortune won, the heights which fate has forbidden the Germans to climb. In German the traditional rule of stress is ineluctable. Stress and number alone govern its rhythms. To make good this judgement, none but supreme examples need be chosen.

Apart from shortcomings in rhythmical elegance, German suffers from an apparent superfluity of consonants, some of which are harsh—especially the guttural CH, which has drawn into its vortex G in certain positions and collocations. On the other hand, its vowels are more pure, and rounder and more sonorous, than our own. Moreover, German gains by the boldness of its R's. Our R's, except at the beginning of a word, have almost faded away, whereby we lose a factor in sound-building. The chief defect of English is the plague of S's and Z's, which are chiefly

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due to our S (Z) for plural, and S (Z) for third person singular. If any speaker, reader, or reciter, has contracted the habit of hissing his S's and Z's, the effect in English is odious. Skilled readers and reciters mute these sibilants so far as possible, and release them only for deliberate effect. The French, with instinctive artistry, early muted their final S's, except in *liaison*.

Now let us take two examples of the German best: Goethe, the great poet, thinker, and craftsman, and Heine, the delicate artist whose creations are enhanced in value by the music of Schumann, and more than deserve that reinforcement. The defects inherent in German are least conspicuous in German ballad poetry, which often reaches a very high level and is not inferior to our own, in so far as that is similar in structure and governed by similar rules. But, as later quotations will prove, some of our ballad poetry has won its freedom and has cultivated variety, with results that can hardly be surpassed by any other metre. For German as for other languages, we shall take the familiar, which, unless public taste is uniformly debased, is also the best, or nearly the best.

Mignon's Song. Goethe.

Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühn?
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht.
Kennst du es wohl? Dahin, Dahin,
Möcht ich mit dir, O mein Geliebter, ziehn!

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There may be, in two or three places, an "inversion" at the beginning of the line, but that is not certain. Otherwise the rhythm is governed by stress, falling on the second syllable of each foot. Possibly the magical charm of this passage is due mainly to the ideas called up, and in part to the subtle "texture," rather than to the rhythm.

But here follows a masterpiece from the first part of *Faust*. The rhythm is varied and noble, but it has not the flexibility of any passage of similar calibre written by Shakespeare, or Milton, or Keats, or Bridges. The last two lines are perhaps the finest pair ever written in German, but here again it is the stupendous image and the texture of the words that work the miracle, rather than the rhythm, which—if the sacrilege could be forgiven—one might be disposed to call stiff.

Faust. First Scene of the Drama.

In Lebensfluthen, im Thatensturm
Wall' ich auf und ab,
Wehe hin und her;
Geburt und Grab,
Ein ewiges Meer,
Ein wechselnd Weben,
Ein glühend Leben,
So schaff' ich am sausenden Webstuhl der Zeit,
Und wirke der Gottheit lebendiges Kleid.

(I sit at the whirring loom of time and fashion the living raiment of the Lord Almighty.)

And now these four stanzas of Heine:

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I

Aus meinen Thränen spriessen
Viel duftende Blumen hervor,
Und meine Seufzer werden
Ein Nachtigallenchor.

Und wenn du mich lieb hast, Kindchen,
Schenk' ich dir die Blumen all',
Und vor deinem Fenster soll klingen
Das Lied der Nachtigall.

II

Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,
Als alle Knospen sprangen,
Da ist in meinem Herzen
Die Liebe aufgegangen.

Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,
Als alle Vögel sangen,
Da hab' ich ihr gestanden
Mein Sehnen und Verlangen.

No admiration could well be too great for them. The point is that their rhythm is governed by stress. An occasional inversion in the first foot, here and there two unaccented syllables together, give the limits of liberty. The skilful disposition of quantity no doubt unobtrusively varies and enriches the effect; the texture is created by the poet, as is the emotion and the colour. But, in comparison with the work of English poets, freedom of movement and control of the medium are

narrowly restricted. Of the German language Omond's phrase, "an immensely powerful stress accent," is true. Thanks to Shakespeare above all, it is not true of the English language.

B. Confusion between Quantity and Stress.

The discussion that follows has been suggested by the fact that certain poets, and some of high rank, have confused stress with quantity. The greatest of these is Goethe.

Goethe wrote much besides the first part of *Faust*, and without laborious search it is difficult to be sure whether in any of his discussions on æsthetic questions he raised the question of adapting German to Greek prosody and the resulting rhythms. A poet is not obliged to reflect upon or to analyse the methods of his own art—still less to justify them to others. Goethe had some knowledge of Greek and Latin poetic masterpieces, though it may have been only a working knowledge, and one cannot doubt that their rhythm reached his sensitive ear. But he did, in fact, apply his skilful hand to poems which he imagined to be composed in accordance with Greek prosody. Here follows a specimen of Goethe's elegiacs. They have merit, and could not fail to have merit. But they are constructed on the principle that an unaccented syllable is short, and an accented syllable is long, irrespective of the element of time. These rhythms are governed by stress, and not by quantity, though the genius of the poet may preserve him from complete absurdity. The lines themselves are

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all right in a way, and—at any rate to my Low German ear—they are reminiscent of the Greek rhythms. But the resemblance is deceptive; the rhythm has no relation to the quantities except now and again.

Elegiac Verses.

Saget, Steine, mir an, O sprecht, ihr hohen Paläste!
Strassen, redet ein Wort! Genius, regst du dich nicht?
Ja, es ist alles beseelt in deinen heiligen Mauern,
Ewige Roma! Nur mir schweiget noch alles so still.
O, wer flüstert mir zu, an welchem Fenster erblick' ich
Einst das holde Geschöpf, das mich versengend erquickt?

How can “regst du dich nicht” scan — ∪ ∪ — ? Or
“das mich versengend erquickt” scan — ∪ ∪ — ∪ ∪ — ?

The poem is a *tour de force*, and not so far removed from plausibility as *Hermann and Dorothea*. When one wants to convict a poet, it is best to take the example most favourable to him. The following is chosen as relatively successful, but how can it have satisfied for a moment an artist who knew his Greek, and also his Latin?

Hermann and Dorothea.

Also standen sie auf und schauten Beide noch einmal
In den Brunnen zurück und süßes Verlangon begriff sie.
Schweigend nahm sie darauf die beiden Krüge beim
Henkel,
Stieg die Stufen hinan, und Hermann folgte der Lieben.
Einen Krug verlangt' er von ihr, die Bürde zu theilen.
“Lass't ihn,” sprach sie; “es trägt sich besser die
gleichere Last so,

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Und der Herr, der Künftig befiehlt, Er soll mir nicht
dienen.

Seht mich so ernst nicht an, als wäre mein Schicksal
bedenklich!

Dienen lerne beizeiten das Weib nach ihrer Bestim-
mung!

Denn durch Dienen allein gelangt sie endlich zum
Herrschen,

Zu der verdienten Gewalt, die doch ihr im Hause
gehöret.

Dienet die Schwester dem Bruder doch früh, sie dienet
den Eltern,

Und ihr Leben ist immer ein ewiges Gehen und
Kommen,

Oder ein Heben und Tragen, Bereiten und Schaffen
für Andre."

The syllables that bear the accent carry everything with them; strength masquerades as length. But very few indeed of the syllables that rank as short would not willingly take up the burden of length, if the faked metre required it of them; and not one in five of them deserves to rank as short in any position. The metre is not suited to German, and cannot be made, even by genius, to work in its service. German will not stand these violent distortions. German is a stress language, and cannot act out of its character.

C. Quantity Experiments in English.

The zealous cultivation of the Greek and Latin masterpieces by English scholars and poets and the

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practice at school and college of composing in Greek and Latin could not fail to lead to experiments, some interesting, some disastrous. Longfellow's effort is not much more unhappy than that of Goethe, but then Longfellow had not so far to fall.

Evangeline. III, ad fin.

Soon with a soundless step the foot of Evangeline
followed.
Up the staircase moved a luminous space in the
darkness,
Lighted less by the lamp than the shining face of the
maiden.
Silent she passed the hall and entered the door of her
chamber.
Simple that chamber was, with its curtains of white,
and its clothes-press,
Ample and high, on whose spacious shelves were
carefully folded
Linen and woollen stuffs, by the hand of Evangeline
woven.
This was the precious dower she would bring to her
husband in marriage,
Better than flocks and herds, being proofs of her skill
as a housewife.
Soon she extinguished her lamp, for the mellow and
radiant moonlight
Streamed through the windows and lighted the room
till the heart of the maiden
Swelled and obeyed its power like the tremulous tides
of the ocean.

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Ah! she was fair, exceeding fair to behold, as she stood
with
Naked snow-white feet on the gleaming floor of her
chamber!

There is not much to be said about this except that it is difficult to understand how a professed poet can have been satisfied with "on whose" = $\cup\cup$ or "Soon she extinguished her lamp" = $-\cup\cup-\cup\cup-$; and the like *passim*. The last line but one of the poem is difficult to scan, though it can be done. To go so far as to print such a poem indicates a defective sense of rhythm in the poet. That it should have been read, and have been popular, indicates some deficiency in his audience—perhaps more than one missing quality.

Tennyson, on the other hand, succeeded in writing at least four genuine stanzas of Alcaics, in which neither the metre, nor the English language, are strained or distorted, as well as a full score of Hendecasyllabics, which it is difficult to fault. Here is one of these Alcaic stanzas, which is not only a praiseworthy experiment but a golden lesson in rhythmic poetry.

O, mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies,
O skilled to write of Time and Eternity.
 God-gifted organ-voice of England
 Milton, a name to resound for ages!

Tennyson showed that it could be done without faking; he proved himself the master and not the slave of his stresses; he displayed the just sense of quantities which is as necessary to the English poet as it was to the Greek.

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But when this and more had been done and well done, in a perfect pentameter—which by the way consists entirely of alien words—he proclaimed that it was not worth doing:

“Barbarous experiments, barbarous hexameters!”

D. Robert Bridges.

And now, what can we make of thee, Robert Bridges, the greatest lyrical master of our half-century? Of your complete works, published in 1913, one-eighth is devoted to poems in Classical Prosody. You were trained at Eton as I was, where our most important weekly task was a copy of Latin verses. For a term's work, if we did creditably, we were “sent up for good.” For a single copy of verses of exceptional merit we might be “sent up off desk,” and that counted for three times as much in our permanent record as the honest labour of a “half.” Did you write Latin verses and enjoy the task? I expect you did. I wonder if you were sent up “off desk.” At any rate you were much interested on “quantitative” work, as you call it. You took Mr. W. J. Stone, an Etonian, who died young, as your guide in adapting Latin quantity to English verse. You found him an imperfect guide, but in your paraphrase of Virgil, *Æneid*, Bk. VI, you have embodied your own improved method, based on his. What did you think of it? Is there any single line that gave you pleasure and pride to remember?

Did you only include these experiments in your 1913

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edition because you had given a great deal of thought to them, and because they might interest a few *conoscenti*? I think it must have been so. For my own part, I judge that you were wasting your time, and that Tennyson chose the better way—that is, the way out. Even if English poets could be trained throughout half a century to work on “quantitative” verse, it is permissible to doubt whether any good would come of it. The prosody of English was evolved by natural development and by the genius of William Shakespeare. No *technique* of importance has been developed since his time. All the tools were in the basket which he left; the succeeding workmen, of whom you were one of the best, each used the tools in his own way and according to his own genius, but none added anything to the fundamentals, not even yourself.

Let us take a little bit of this pseudo-classical work of yours: in which you must have put some of your improvements on W. J. Stone, otherwise it would hardly be set in the forefront.

Thousand threads of rain and fine white wreathing of
air-mist
Hide from us earth's greenness, hide the enarching
azure,
Yet with a breath of spring homeward conveying
attend us,
And the mellow flutings of passionate Philomel.

If one was not told that this poem was written in elegiacs one might be very grateful for it. It is a charming little piece, and honest English lyric rhythm

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can stand at least as much freedom as it appears to claim. But when I am told that "And the mellow flutings of passionate Philomel" is a pentameter, I am inclined to use the vulgar phrase: "Go on!" If you force me, I can see what you are at. But it is a pity you ever tried to put forward anything so unnatural. Fortunately, you did not spend so much as an eighth of your singing time on this labour of Sisyphus. But we must regret that any of it was so wasted.

CHAPTER IV

STRESS REASSERTS ITS MASTERY IN ENGLISH

AFTER these digressions, it may be well to restate the main thesis. Of the three elements in rhythm—stress, number and quantity—stress mainly governed English metre up to the time of Chaucer, when the influence of the French element in our language had mitigated the force of the stresses and allowed the varying value of the quantities fuller play in the rhythm. Shakespeare, and after him Milton in his own way, carried this emancipation further. Taking the ten syllable line as the simplest unit, we find in the finished product of Shakespeare, and also of Milton, a varying number of stresses in the several lines. The stresses themselves vary in force, and the location of them can be modified at the “sweet will” of the poet. A living movement results, the very rhythm of life.

Verse based on stresses, on the number of syllables and the disposition of stresses, may develop higher rhythmical qualities under the subtle influence of quantity. But the more dominant the stress pattern, the more rigid, the more uninteresting the rhythms. However, even in a primitive poem like *Beowulf*, we must assume that a skilled reciter or chanter got some of his most striking effects by the prolongation of selected syllables, the speeding or the slurring of others. Thus would be created a complicated blend of fixed

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stresses with variegated time effects. The succession of stressed and unstressed syllables may be regular, but the quantities will have their own values. Out of the fusion of the three elements rhythm results, and has been perfected over many centuries by native effort and the help of foreign example. The magic of the poet knows how to blend and to bind the elements into a single harmonious tissue which woof and warp combine to create, together with colour and quality to enrich the harmonious effect. Stress and quantity and number combine to create rhythm. The other ingredients of beauty in poetry do not come within the scope of this essay. Yet, so far as possible, the examples chosen will be those which appear both free from blemish and invested with beauty, that so the effect of the cunning rhythms may not be obscured by irrelevant faults.

A. The Heroic Couplet. A Change of Fashion.

Shakespeare and Milton had gone as far as man can go in elaborating and perfecting the blank verse of ten syllables (or of about ten) with stresses sufficiently regular to provide a pleasing alternation without monotony. Lyrical poetry, as we have seen, both in its grave movements and in its airy flights, adopted a like system of ordered liberty. Before Milton had published *Paradise Lost* Dryden had got to work. He had no sooner put his head in front of his contemporaries, than he proclaimed the superior merits of rhymed over blank verse. Did Dryden change the fashion? Or was a change of fashion overdue? At any rate from his time

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onward over a full century and a half order was dominant and liberty restricted. What we lost in variety of rhythm by the dominance of the heroic couplet we gained in point, in rhetoric, in pungency, perhaps in polish and symmetry. The heroic couplet, that is to say, the favourite metre of Chaucer—with a difference—became an universal mode, and held its supremacy, until (perhaps) the Revolutionary spirit, which overthrew the monarchy in France, struck off the gyves of poetry. Roughly, from 1670 to 1820, not only in narrative, dramatic, contemplative, satiric, and descriptive poetry, but also in the lyrical verse of our countrymen, regular stresses were predominant in metre. The stresses in this period did not become so rigid and heavy as those in German, but the frame for rhythm became less elastic.

Let us first take a couple of passages from Dryden. None of his lyrical poetry will be quoted, but readers can easily judge that poetry for themselves. Order and rhetoric govern the lyrical modes of the whole period; and, if any English poet was ruled by his stresses, Scott, the last poet of the old school, most heartily clung to his chains. Nevertheless, the freedom first grasped by Chaucer, and afterwards asserted and developed by Shakespeare and Milton, still lives and moves behind the orderly pattern of the surface. This is true of the great masters; the lesser breed, under the eighteenth-century convention, were saved from the graver faults of taste by the stricter rules, and escaped the extreme penalties of their own mediocrity.

The couplet, self-limited, self-contained, and complete in itself, lends itself readily to antithesis. The

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antithetic habit dominates Dryden and his school, but nowhere is it more dominant and effective than in the following, with its smooth and deadly invective.

Dryden. *Absalom and Achitophel*. 545—568.
Character of George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham,
1628-87.

In the first rank of these did Zimri stand
A man so various that he seemed to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome:
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
Was everything by starts and nothing long;
But in the course of one revolving moon
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon;
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.
Blest madman, who could every hour employ
With something new to wish or to enjoy!
Railing and praising were his usual themes,
And both, to show his judgement, in extremes:
So over violent or over civil
That every man with him was God or Devil.
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art;
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.
Beggared by fools whom still he found too late,
He had his jest, and they had his estate.
He laughed himself from Court; then sought relief
By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief;
For spite of him, the weight of business fell
On Absalom and wise Achitophel;
Thus wicked but in will, of means bereft,
He left not faction, but of that was left.

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In the next extract the antithetic bias still prevails in the form, but hardly obscures the deep sincerity of the poet. In this also the regular succession of the stresses is conspicuous, though not tyrannous. The triplet with which the passage ends is a not infrequent device; it reduces monotony and gives more freedom of movement. There is little "running-over" between the lines, and none between the couplets. Throughout in Pope and Dryden there are, as a rule, four alternate stresses in each line, and a fifth in the first foot, often falling on the first syllable of the line.

Dryden. *The Hind and the Panther*, 526-537.

One in herself, not rent by schism, but sound,
Entire, one solid shining diamond,
Not sparkles shattered into sects like you:
One is the Church, and must be to be true,
One central principle of unity;
As undivided, so from errors free;
As one in faith, so one in sanctity.
Thus she, and none but she, the insulting rage
Of heretics opposed from age to age;
Still, when the giant-brood invades her throne,
She stoops from heaven and meets them half way down,
And with paternal thunder vindicates her crown.

Now for three passages from Pope—all famous, all free from fault, all admired, and all admirable. The delicate phrasing of the first, the exquisite choice of words, the skilful blending of the consonants and the vowels, cannot easily be surpassed.

STRESS REASSERTS ITS MASTERY IN ENGLISH

The lines from the *Dunciad* can hardly be matched for polished and restrained ferocity; those from the *Essay on Man* present a philosophic doctrine which in expression at least defies criticism. It took a hundred and fifty years to weary the fickle world of the fashion inaugurated by Dryden and Pope.

Pope. *Rape of the Lock*. Canto II, 47—68.

But now secure the painted vessel glides,
The sunbeams trembling on the floating tides:
While melting music steals upon the sky,
And softened sounds along the waters die;
Smooth flow the waves, the zephyrs gently play,
Belinda smiled, and all the world was gay.
All but the sylph—with careful thoughts opprest,
Th' impending woe sat heavy on his breast.
He summons straight his denizens of air;
The lucid squadrons round the sails repair:
Soft o'er the shrouds ærial whispers breathe,
That seemed but zephyrs to the train beneath.
Some to the sun their insect wings unfold,
Waft on the breeze, or sink in clouds of gold;
Transparent forms, too fine for mortal sight,
Their fluid bodies half dissolved in light.
Loose to the wind their airy garments flew,
Thin glitt'ring textures of the filmy dew,
Dipped in the richest tincture of the skies,
Where light disports in ever-mingling dyes,
While ev'ry beam new transient colours flings,
Colours that change whene'er they wave their wings.

Pope. *The Dunciad*. Book IV, I, 569-604.

Then, blessing all, "Go, children of my care!
To practice now from theory repair.
All my commands are easy, short, and full:
My sons! be proud, be selfish, and be dull.
Guard my prerogative, assert my throne:
This nod confirms each privilege your own.
The cap and switch be sacred to his grace;
With staff and pumps the marquis lead the race;
From stage to stage the licensed earl may run,
Paired with his fellow-charioteer, the sun;
The learned baron butterflies design,
Or draw to silk Arachne's subtle line;
The judge to dance his brother sergeant call;
The senator at cricket urge the ball;
The bishop stow (pontific luxury!)
An hundred souls of turkeys in a pie;
The sturdy squire to Gallic masters stoop,
And drown his lands and manors in a soupe.
Others import yet nobler arts from France,
Teach kings to fiddle, and make senates dance.
Perhaps more high some daring son may soar,
Proud to my list to add one monarch more!
And nobly conscious, princes are but things
Born for first ministers, as slaves for kings,
Tyrant supreme! shall three estates command,
And make one mighty Dunciad of the land!"

Pope. *Essay on Man*. IV, 217-236.

Look next on greatness; say where greatness lies.
"Where, but among the heroes and the wise?"

STRESS REASSERTS ITS MASTERY IN ENGLISH

Heroes are much the same, the point's agreed,
From Macedonia's madmen to the Swede;
The whole strange purpose of their lives, to find
Or make, an enemy of all mankind.
Not one looks backward, onward still he goes,
Yet ne'er looks forward farther than his nose.
No less alike the politic and wise;
All sly slow things, with circumspective eyes:
Men in their loose unguarded hours they take,
Not that themselves are wise, but others weak.
But grant that those can conquer, these can cheat;
'Tis phrase absurd to call a villain great:
Who wickedly is wise, or madly brave,
Is but the more a fool, the more a knave.
Who noble ends by noble means obtains,
Or failing, smiles in exile or in chains,
Like good Aurelius let him reign, or bleed
Like Socrates, that man is great indeed.

Before we leave the great masters of stressed metres
we must pause to welcome a fine example from a
vigorous and manly poet, who clung to the old measures
long after that fashion had lost its ascendancy.

Scott. *Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
 This is my own, my native land
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd
 From wandering on a foreign strand?

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

If such there be, go, mark him well!
For him no minstrel raptures swell;
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim,
Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.

It would be idle to condemn the eighteenth century root and branch, but it is needless to enumerate the masters and the little masters who used the heroic couplet. Even the best of James Thomson (of *The Seasons*) and of Goldsmith displays but little originality, at any rate in rhythm, and poor Cowper in his poetry seldom escapes from dullness, excepting in *John Gilpin* and *Madame Blaize*, and those two playful efforts in the ballad measure do not attempt any novelty of rhythm such as will be illustrated below. Robert Burns has unique merit when he uses the Scottish tongue, but his verse draws its magic from no rhythmical innovation. On the whole the eighteenth century need not long detain us during our quest.

B. The Revolt.

Suddenly, in 1817, a young man broke the tradition of Dryden and of Pope, long since worn with use. The author of *Endymion* laid hands on the ten syllable couplet, and in his hands the familiar metre was trans-

THE REVOLT OF THE POETS

formed. Unhappily, he was in a hurry to "glean his teeming brain." His story of *Endymion* is a golden dream, but many of the best passages in that poem are marred by careless blemishes that belie the poet's mastery. Yet he made a new thing of the English heroic couplet; it was not changed but it was made anew. It is idle to analyse the process by which he transformed its rhythm. We might make lists of such devices as over-running, shifting of stresses, weak endings, and the like; but it is better to acknowledge the rise of a new master whose rhythm is not only new—it is a new creation. It is raised to its highest pitch in the lyrical poems of the short-lived youth, but it is best defined by examples. His influence may be felt in all the best poetry that has been written since his short day.

From *Endymion*, Book I.

"This river does not see the naked sky,
Till it begins to progress silverly
Around the western border of the wood,
Whence, from a certain spot, its winding flood
Seems at the distance like a crescent moon:
And in that nook, the very pride of June,
Had I been used to pass my weary eves;
The rather for the sun unwilling leaves
So dear a picture of his sovereign power,
And I could witness his most kingly hour,
When he doth tighten up the golden reins,
And paces leisurely down amber plains
His snorting four.

Ibid, Book II.

Forth from a rugged arch, in the dusk below,
 Came mother Cybele!—alone—alone—
 In sombre chariot; dark foldings thrown
 About her majesty, and front death-pale,
 With turrets crown'd. Four maned lions hale
 The sluggish wheels; solemn their toothed maws,
 Their surly eyes brow-hidden, heavy paws
 Uplifted drowsily, and nervy tails
 Cowering their tawny brushes. Silent sails
 This shadowy queen athwart, and faints away
 In another gloomy arch.

Ibid, Book II.

After a thousand mazes overgone,
 At last, with sudden step, he came upon
 A chamber, myrtle-wall'd, embower'd high,
 Full of light, incense, tender minstrelsy,
 And more of beautiful and strange beside:
 For on a silken couch of rosy pride,
 In midst of all, there lay a sleeping youth
 Of fondest beauty; fonder, in fair sooth,
 Than sighs could fathom, or contentment reach:
 And coverlids gold-tinted like the peach,
 Or ripe October's faded marigolds,
 Fell sleek about him in a thousand folds—
 Not hiding up an Apollonian curve
 Of neck and shoulder, nor the tenting swerve
 Of knee from knee, nor ankles pointing light;
 But rather, giving them to the fill'd sight

THE REVOLT

Officially. Sideway his face reposed
On one white arm, and tenderly unclosed,
By tenderest pressure, a faint damask mouth
To slumb'ry pout; just as the morning south
Disparts a dew-lipp'd rose. Above his head,
Four lily stalks did their white honours wed
To make a coronal; and round him grew
All tendrils green, of every bloom and hue,
Together intertwined and tramell'd fresh:
The vine of glossy sprout; the ivy mesh,
Shading its Ethiop berries; and woodbine,
Of velvet leaves and bugle-blooms divine;
Convolvulus in streaked vases flush;
The creeper, mellowing for an autumn blush;
And virgin's bower, trailing airily;

Swinburne deserves and will later receive a section to himself for his original and masterly use of metres reckoned by stressed and unstressed syllables. His use of the rhymed couplet has been highly praised; his passionate adoration of the sea always rouses him to flights, admirable, but lacking restraint and condensation. Of him might be said irreverently, as the child said aloud in church of the preacher: "Mummie, is that man allowed to go on talking as long as he likes?"

The following extract has the merits as well as the faults of Swinburne; but Swinburne never reaches the level of Keats' best; moreover, Swinburne learnt from Keats: Keats, even if his life had been prolonged three-fold, would have had little to learn from Swinburne.

Swinburne. *Tristram of Lyonesse.*

The Last Pilgrimage.

With a cry of love that rang
As from a trumpet golden-mouthed, he sprang;
As towards a mother's where his head might rest
Her child rejoicing, toward the strong sea's breast
That none may gird nor measure: and his heart
Sent forth a shout that bade his lips not part,
But triumphed in him silent; no man's voice,
No song, no sound of clarions that rejoice,
Can set that glory forth which fills with fire
The body and soul that have their whole desire
Silent, and freer than birds or dreams are free
Take all their will of all the encountering sea.
And toward the foam he bent and forward smote,
Laughing, and launched his body like a boat
Full to the sea-beach, and against the tide
Struck strongly forth with amorous arms made wide
To take the bright breast of the wave to kiss
And on his lips the sharp sweet minute's hiss
Given of the wave-lips for a breath's space curled
And pure as at the day dawn of the world.
And round him all the bright rough shuddering sea
Kindled, as though the world were even as he,
Heart-strung with exultation of desire:
And all the life that moved him seemed to aspire,
As all the sea's life toward the sun: and still
Delight within him waxed with quickening will
More smooth and strong and perfect as a flame
That springs and spreads, till each glad limb became

THE FRUITS OF THE REVOLT

A note of rapture in the tune of life,
Live music mild and keen as sleep and strife:
Till the sweet change that bade the sense grow sure
Of deeper depth and purity more pure
Wrapped him and lapped him round with clearer cold
And all the rippling green grew royal gold
Between him and the far sun's rising rim.

And now, before we quit the rhymed couplet and its two avatars, severe and restrained with Pope, easy and graceful, soft and melodious with Keats, it is a real pleasure to include in our list of treasures a little fragment of a youth, much loved and much admired, whose rare essence, bred of English soil and nursed by English air, lies mingled with the soil of a Grecian Isle, an end which he had dreamed for himself. He might have been one of our chosen band of poets, had the Gods permitted. The rhythm of these few lines shows promise such as his own friends saw in their visions of him.

Rupert Brooke. *The Great Lover.*

I have been so great a lover: filled my days
So proudly with the splendour of Love's praise,
The pain, the calm, and the astonishment,
Desire illimitable, and still content,
And all dear names men use, to cheat despair,
For the perplexed and viewless streams that bear
Our hearts at random down the dark of life.
Now, ere the unthinking silence on that strife
Steals down, I would cheat drowsy Death so far,
My night shall be remembered for a star

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

That outshone all the suns of all men's days.
Shall I not crown them with immortal praise
Whom I have loved, who have given me, dared with me
High secrets, and in darkness knelt to see
The inenarrable godhead of delight?
Love is a flame;—we have beaconed the world's night.
A city:—and we have built it, these and I.
An emperor:—we have taught the world to die.
So, for their sakes I loved, ere I go hence,
And the high cause of Love's magnificence,
And to keep loyalties young, I'll write those names
Golden for ever, eagles, crying flames,
And set them as a banner, that men may know,
To dare the generations, burn, and blow
Out on the wind of Time, shining and streaming . . .

CHAPTER V

NINETEENTH CENTURY BLANK VERSE

PERHAPS the natural attitude for the poets, who were tempted to write blank verse in the nineteenth century, would have been that of Keats himself, who is said to have left unfinished his fragment of *Hyperion*, because he could not shake himself free of the Miltonian manner, and yet could not aspire to compete with the Master. Nevertheless the century gave us some magnificent and majestic lines. I choose a passage from *Hyperion* which we should be sorry to do without; there are one or two tiresome faults, but the poet cannot be said, in this passage at least, to owe any apology to Milton. And it has the true rhythm of Keats, which it is easier to admire than to analyse.

Keats. *Hyperion*.

As when, upon a tranced summer-night,
Those green-robed senators of mighty woods,
Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
Save from one gradual solitary gust
Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,
As if the ebbing air had but one wave:
So came these words and went; the while in tears

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

She touch'd her fair large forehead to the ground,
Just where her falling hair might be outspread
A soft and silken mat for Saturn's feet.
One moon, with alteration slow, had shed
Her silver seasons four upon the night
And still these two were postured motionless,
Like natural sculpture in cathedral cavern;
The frozen God still couchant on the earth,
And the sad Goddess weeping at his feet:
Until at length old Saturn lifted up
His faded eyes, and saw his kingdom gone,
And all the gloom and sorrow of the place.

The worst thing about Blank Verse is the ease with which it can be written. The present age fights shy of it; too much of it was written by their fathers and grandfathers. The Wordsworth of the *Excursion*, the most self-satisfied prig who ever aspired to be a poet, was perhaps the worst offender. The following well-known passage may almost escape censure, though the rhythms are crude and obvious. The picture is not only vigorous, but, as the French say, it has been seen. The *Excursion* has long been condemned, but the *Prelude*, by contrast with its more appalling sequel, has been cosseted with vain praise. Wordsworth had a strong character and a firm belief in his own merit. He imposed upon our ancestors and was imposed upon our contemporaries. However, it must be admitted that this episode is delightful, though its rhythms verge on the commonplace.

Wordsworth. *Prelude.*

All shod with steel,
We hissed along the polished ice in games
Confederate, imitative of the chase
And woodland pleasures,—the resounding horn,
The pack loud chiming, and the hunted hare.
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle; with the din
Smitten, the precipices rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; while far distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy not unnoticed, while the stars
Eastward were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.
Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideways, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the reflex of a star
That fled, and, flying still before me, gleamed
Upon the glassy plain; and oftentimes,
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopped short; yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me—even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round!
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train,
Feebler and feebler, and I stood and watched
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

Four passages of Tennyson follow. There is a great deal of his blank verse. The youth of a past generation loved it dearly, and it can still be read with pleasure. The rhythms are faultless; stress, quantity, and number, are admirably blended; if it now seems a little precious, a little anæmic, that may not be the poet's fault. I have often wondered why Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* had such a hold upon the poets and artists of the early Victorian era. Was it by way of escape from the dismal present—the "hungry forties," the blackened moors and valleys, the jerry-built factories, the conditions revealed by the Poor Law Commission of 1832, and the gloomy remedies which it fathered; escape from the smug monotony of upper class life, and the even narrower outlook of the middle class? Malory's antique and exquisite prose and his mysterious legendary world of brave deeds and fair ladies, which was as far removed from his own times as it was from the youthful days of Tennyson, supplied an admirable basis for poetry and yet——! The result is a masquerade, a foreign masquerade, an antiquated masquerade, and its devotees at second-hand lose something of their hold on earth and living humanity. Even the language, as revived in the last century, though beautiful as these passages will show, is not only archaic but affected; the stage properties and even the heroes and the heroines lack the homely tang of humanity. After all, these verses with their rhythms which are beyond criticism, and their many beauties, leave me—but to go further would be to travel outside our limits. The Oenone passage (which reads like a lyric, though it is good blank verse) seems closest to the mark of highest merit.

Tennyson. *The Passing of Arthur.*

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
 'The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
 And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
 Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
 Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
 I have lived my life, and that which I have done
 May He within Himself make pure! but thou,
 If thou shouldst never see my face again,
 Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
 Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
 Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
 For what men are better than sheep or goats
 That nourish a blind life within the brain,
 If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
 Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
 For so the whole round earth is every way
 Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
 But now farewell. I am going a long way
 With these thou seest—if indeed I go—
 (For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
 To the island-valley of Avilion;
 Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
 Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
 Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
 And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
 Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.'

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

Merlin and Vivien.

At last they found—his foragers for charms—
A little glassy-headed hairless man,
Who lived alone in a great wild on grass;
Read but one book, and ever reading grew
So grated down and filed away with thought,
So lean his eyes were monstrous; while the skin
Clung but to crate and basket, ribs and spine.
And since he kept his mind on one sole aim,
Nor ever touch'd fierce wine, nor tasted flesh,
Nor own'd a sensual wish, to him the wall
That sunders ghosts and shadow-casting men
Became a crystal, and he saw them thro' it,
And heard their voices talk behind the wall,
And learnt their elemental secrets, powers
And forces; often o'er the sun's bright eye
Drew the vast eyelid of an inky cloud,
And lash'd it at the base with slanting storm;
Or in the noon of mist and driving rain,
When the lake whiten'd and the pinewood roar'd,
And the cairn'd mountain was a shadow, sunn'd
The world to peace again: here was the man.

The Holy Grail.

“Sweet brother, I have seen the Holy Grail:
For, waked at dead of night, I heard a sound
As of a silver horn from o'er the hills
Blown, and I thought, ‘It is not Arthur’s use
To hunt by moonlight;’ and the slender sound
As from a distance beyond distance grew

NINETEENTH CENTURY BLANK VERSE

Coming upon me—O never harp nor horn,
Nor aught we blow with breath, or touch with hand,
Was like that music as it came; and then
Stream'd thro' my cell a cold and silver beam,
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,
Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,
Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed
With rosy colours leaping on the wall;
And then the music faded, and the Grail
Past, and the beam decay'd, and from the walls
The rosy quiverings died into the night."

Oenone.

"O mother Ida, many-fountain'd Ida
Dear mother Ida, harken ere I die.
For now the noonday quiet holds the hill:
The grasshopper is silent in the grass:
The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
Rests like a shadow, and the winds are dead.
The purple flower droops: the golden bee
Is lily-cradled: I alone awake.
My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love,
My heart is breaking, and my eyes are
dim,
And I am all aweary of my life."

Here are, to close the chapter, two passages in blank verse that prove that Shakespeare and Milton did not work in vain. Apart from the marvels that they wrought themselves, they perfected a measure which modern poets may use, each after his own genius.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

Matthew Arnold was at his best a poet of high rank and an artist in rhythm; Swinburne a great master of words and measures, and, like Arnold, a close student of the Greeks. With regard to passages like these, the judgement that blank verse is easy to write cannot stand. Of Swinburne there is hardly anything better.

Matthew Arnold. *Sohrab and Rustum*.

As when some hunter in the spring hath found
A breeding eagle sitting on her nest,
Upon the craggy isle of a hill-lake,
And pierced her with an arrow as she rose,
And follow'd her to find her where she fell
Far off;—anon her mate comes winging back
From hunting, and a great way off descries
His huddling young left sole; at that, he checks
His pinion, and with short uneasy sweeps
Circles above his eyry, with loud screams
Chiding his mate back to her nest; but she
Lies dying, with the arrow in her side,
In some far stony gorge out of his ken,
A heap of fluttering feathers—never more
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it;
Never the black and dripping precipices
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by—
As that poor bird flies home, nor knows his loss,
So Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.

Swinburne. *Atalanta in Calydon.*

Meleager's Speech.

And I too as thou sayest have seen great things;
 Seen elsewhere, but chiefly when the sail
 First caught between stretched ropes the roaring west,
 And all our oars smote eastward, and the wind
 First flung round faces of seafaring men
 White splendid snow-flakes of the sundering foam,
 And the first furrow in virginal green sea
 Followed the plunging ploughshare of hewn pine,
 And closed, as when deep sleep subdues man's breath
 Lips close and heart subsides; and closing, shone
 Sunlike with many a Nereid's hair, and moved
 Round many a trembling mouth of doubtful gods,
 Risen out of sunless and sonorous gulfs
 Through waning water and into shallow light,
 That watched us; and when flying the dove was snared
 As with men's hands, but we shot after and sped
 Clear through the irremeable Symplegades;
 And chiefiest when hoar beach and herbless cliff
 Stood out ahead from Colchis, and we heard
 Clefts hoarse with wind, and saw through narrowing
 reefs
 The lightning of the intolerable wave
 Flash, and the white wet flame of breakers burn
 Far under a kindling south-wind, as a lamp
 Burns and bends all its blowing flame one way;
 Wild heights untravelled of the wind, and vales
 Cloven seaward by their violent streams, and white
 With bitter flowers and bright salt scurf of brine;

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

Heard sweep their sharp swift gales, and bowing
birdwise

Shriek with birds' voices, and with furious feet
Tread loose the long skirts of a storm, and saw
The whole white Euxine clash together and fall
Full-mouthed, and thunderous from a thousand
throats:

Yet we drew thither and won the fleece.

CHAPTER VI

BALLAD MEASURES

I SAID above that ballad measure was better suited to modern German with its heavy stresses, than it is to modern English. Nevertheless, it was no doubt the most popular measure in this country before English was blended with French, and before we borrowed fashions from the French and the Italians. There have been long and indecisive debates between scholars as to the origin of ballad poetry. One school postulates a communal origin for the early ballads, as if a melody or a poem could issue from the multitude without the intervention of a poet or a musician. It is safer to deny such miracles, while admitting that a tale or a legend once framed in verse, as it passed through many memories and some inventive minds, would inevitably be changed, often enriched and amplified, but in some instances corrupted and distorted. At any rate, there can be few of the ballads which have come down to us from the obscure past that were not modified when they first were put into print, or, indeed, when first they were written down.

A short study of extant ballads of ancient origin will reveal that the measure is indeed governed by stresses and punctuated with rhyme, but that, on the other hand, great variety is permitted as regards the fall of the stresses and the introduction of superfluous syllables. The typical, if not the basic, form is no doubt the

fourteener: two fourteeners make up the unit, which in early days took the shape of four lines, with syllables 8, 6, 8, 6, and the last word in the fourth line rhyming with the last word in the second. But the stanza made up of two pairs of octosyllabic lines is almost equally common, and the introduction of a fifth line in a stanza is not rare. Occasionally a line may be shortened, especially at the end of a stanza. Weak endings are permissible, and the pairs of lines may be run into single lines, with a variable cæsure. The eight-syllable couplets which Scott affected are also to be found among early ballad forms. In fact, in the ballad poetry of primitive origin which has come down to us, the poetic licence, characteristic of the English, may be observed in all its careless and often delightful manifestations.

When we come to modern times, we find that the primitive form has maintained its hold in spite of changes of fashion, and has shown itself capable of wonderful developments, by the same magical art that has given new beauty to blank verse and to the ten-syllable couplet.

Auld Robin Gray, the first example to be quoted here, is surely, and especially for the time at which it was written, a masterpiece of modulation, and the resulting rhythms can hardly be surpassed.

Lady Anne Lindsay. *Auld Robin Gray*. 1750-1825.
 Young Jamie lo'ed me well and sought me for his bride,
 And saving a crown he had nothing else beside:
 To make the crown a pund, young Jamie gaed to sea;
 And the crown and the pund were baith for me.

BALLAD MEASURES

He hadna been awa' a week but only twa,
When my father brake his arm, and the cow was
stown awa',
My mother she fell sick, and my Jamie at the sea,
And Auld Robin Gray came a' courting me.

My father couldna' work and my mother couldna' spin,
I toiled day and night, but their bread I couldna' win;
Auld Rob maintained them both, and wi' tears in
his e'e
Said, Jennie, for their sakes, O marry me!

My heart, it said nay; I looked for Jamie back;
But the wind it blew high, and the ship it was a
wrack;
His ship it was a wrack—Why didna Jamie dee?
Or why do I live to cry, Wae's me!

My father urged me sair; my mother didna' speak;
But she looked in my face till my heart was like to
break;
They gi'ed him my hand, tho' my heart was in the sea;
Sae auld Robin Gray he was gudeman to me.

I hadna been a wife a week but only four,
When mournfu' as I sat on the stane at the door,
I saw my Jamie's wraith—for I couldna think it he,
Till he said, "I'm come hame to marry thee."

Oh sair, sair did we greet, and muckle did we say;
We took but ae kiss, and we tore ourselves away;
I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to dee,
And why was I born to say, wae's me!

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

I gang like a ghist, and I carena to spin;
I daurna think on Jamie, for that wad be a sin;
But I'll do my best a gude wife aye to be,
For auld Robin Gray he is kind unto me.

Here follows a sea-song written by a landsman and in perfect English by a Scot. The rousing swing of the regular beats suits the vigorous theme as the mournful modulations of Lady Anne's measure harmonise with her melancholy story.

Allan Cunningham. *A Sea-Song.*

A wet sheet and a flowing sea,
A wind that follows fast,
And fills the white and rustling sail,
And bends the gallant mast;
And bends the gallant mast, my boys,
While, like the eagle free,
Away the good ship flies, and leaves
Old England on the lee.

Oh for a soft and gentle wind!
I hear a fair one cry;
But give to me the snoring breeze
And white waves heaving high;
And white waves heaving high, my lads,
The good ship tight and free—
The world of waters is our home,
And merry men are we.

BALLAD MEASURES

There's tempest in yon hornèd moon,
And lightning in yon cloud;
But hark the music, mariners!
The wind is piping loud;
The wind is piping loud, my boys,
The lightning flashes free—
While the hollow oak our palace is,
Our heritage the sea.

The following stanzas may fairly be classed among the examples of ballad measures; their dactylic and anapæstic movements well illustrate the flexibility of this mode. They build up a masterpiece to which I have never wavered in my devotion, since I heard it declaimed by Eastwood *ma.* in Upper School at Eton; but those who, like myself, learned to sing the poem to Stanford's setting with the composer as conductor, had an unusual opportunity of studying, not only the words and their rhythms, but also their musical interpretation.

Tennyson. *The Revenge.*

III

So Lord Howard past away with five ships of war that
day,
Till he melted like a cloud in the silent summer heaven;
But Sir Richard bore in hand all his sick men from the
land
Very carefully and slow,
Men of Bideford in Devon,
And we laid them on the ballast down below;

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

For we brought them all aboard,
And they blest him in their pain, that they were not left
to Spain,
To the thumbscrew and the stake, for the glory of the
Lord.

IV

He had only a hundred seamen to work the ship and to
fight,
And he sailed away from Flores till the Spaniard came
in sight,
With his huge sea-castles heaving upon the weather
bow.
'Shall we fight or shall we fly?
Good Sir Richard, tell us now,
For to fight is but to die!
There'll be little of us left by the time this sun is set.'
And Sir Richard said again: 'We be all good English
men.
Let us bang these dogs of Seville, the children of the
devil,
For I never turn'd my back upon Don or devil yet.'

XIV

And they stared at the dead that had been so valiant
and true,
And had holden the power and glory of Spain so cheap

BALLAD MEASURES

That he dared her with one little ship and his English
few;
Was he devil or man? He was devil for aught they
knew,
But they sank his body with honour down into the
deep,
And they mann'd the *Revenge* with a swarthier alien
crew,
And away she sail'd with her loss and long'd for her
own;
When a wind from the lands they had ruin'd awoke
from sleep,
And the water began to heave and the weather to moan,
And or ever that evening ended a great gale blew,
And a wave like the wave that is raised by an earth-
quake grew,
Till it smote on their hulls and their sails and their
masts and their flags,
And the whole sea plunged and fell on the shot-
shatter'd navy of Spain,
And the little *Revenge* herself went down by the island
crag
To be lost evermore in the main.

Here is another sea-born cousin of the ballad, but
with a different spirit and different modulations.

Sir Henry Newbolt. *Drake's Drum.*

Drake he's in his hammock an' a thousand mile away,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)
Slung atween the round shot in Nombre Dios Bay,

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.
Yarnder lumes the Island, yarnder lie the ships,
Wi' sailor-lads a-dancin' heel-an'-toe,
An' the shore-lights flashin', an' the night-tide dashin',
He sees et arl so plainly as he saw et long ago.

Drake he was a Devon man, an' ruled the Devon seas,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)
Rovin' tho' his death fell, he went wi' heart at ease,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.
"Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore,
Strike et when your powder's runnin' low;
If the Dons sight Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven,
An' drum them up the Channel as we drummed them
long ago."

Drake he's in his hammock till the great Armadas come,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below?)
Slung atween the round shot, listenin' for the drum,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.
Call him on the deep sea, call him up the Sound,
Call him when ye sail to meet the foe;
Where the old trade's plyin' an' the old flag flyin'
They shall find him ware an' wakin', as they found
him long ago!

And now a great poem of Kipling, with a great warning to a stubborn people. This is the ballad-measure cunningly developed, with resolutions, anapaestic and dactylic, with surprising but delightful rhymes lurking in the very centre of the poetry, with weak endings throughout after the brief exordium; a magnificent movement, a magnificent message proudly

BALLAD MEASURES

and fearlessly delivered. Here we have an extreme example of violent stresses boldly and arrogantly used, to show, among other things, what English rhythms may be when they vibrate with the regular throb of a great liner ploughing the opposing waters.

THE CITY OF BRASS

“Here was a people whom after their works thou shalt see wept over for their lost dominion: and in this palace is the last information respecting lords collected in the dust.”—

(The Arabian Nights.)

In a land that the sand overlays—the ways to her gates are untrod—

A multitude ended their days whose fates were made splendid by God,

Till they grew drunk and were smitten with madness and went to their fall,

And of these is a story written: but Allah alone knoweth all!

When the wine stirred in their heart their bosoms dilated,

They rose to suppose themselves kings over all things created—

To decree a new earth at a birth without labour or sorrow—

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

To declare: "We prepare it to-day and inherit to-morrow."

They chose themselves prophets and priests of minute understanding,

Men swift to see done, and outrun, their extremest commanding—

Of the tribe which describe with a jibe the perversions of Justice—

Panders avowed to the crowd whatsoever its lust is.

Swiftly these pulled down the walls that their fathers had made them—

The impregnable ramparts of old, they razed and relaid them

As playgrounds of pleasure and leisure with limitless entries,

And havens of rest for the wastrels where once walked the sentries;

And because there was need of more pay for the shouters and marchers,

They disbanded in face of their foemen their yeomen and archers.

They replied to their well-wishers' fears—to their enemies' laughter,

Saying: "Peace! We have fashioned a God Which shall save us hereafter.

We ascribe all dominion to Man in his factions conferring,

And have given to numbers the Name of the Wisdom unerring."

BALLAD MEASURES

They said: "Who has hate in his soul? Who has envied
his neighbour?

Let him arise and control both that man and his
labour."

They said: "Who is eaten by sloth? Whose unthrift has
destroyed him?

He shall levy a tribute from all because none have
employed him."

They said: "Who hath toiled? Who hath striven, and
gathered possession?

Let him be spoiled. He hath given full proof of
transgression."

They said: "Who is irked by the Law? *Though we may
not remove it,*

If he lend us his aid in this raid, we will set him above it!"

So the robber did judgment again upon such as
displeased him,

The slayer, too, boasted his slain, and the judges
released him.

As for their kinsmen far off, on the skirts of the nation

They harried all earth to make sure none escaped
reprobation.

They awakened unrest for a jest in their newly won
borders,

And jeered at the blood of their brethren betrayed by
their orders.

They instructed the ruled to rebel, their rulers to aid
them;

And, since such as obliged them not fell, then viceroys
obeyed them.

When the riotous set them at naught they said: Praise
the upheaval.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

They unwound and flung from them with rage, as a rag
that defiled them,
The imperial gains of the age which their forefathers
piled them.
They ran panting in haste to lay waste and embitter for
ever
The wellsprings of Wisdom and Strength which are
Faith and Endeavour.
They nosed out and dugged up and dragged forth and
exposed to derision
All doctrine of purpose and wrath and restraint and
prevision:
And it ceased, and God granted them all things for
which they had striven,
And the heart of a beast in the place of a man's heart
was given. . . .
When they were fullest of wine and most flagrant in error,
Out of the sea rose a sign—out of Heaven a terror.
Then they saw, then they heard, then they knew—for
none troubled to hide it—
An host had prepared their destruction, but still they
denied it.
They denied what they dared not abide if it came to the
trial,
But the Sword that was forged while they lied did not
heed their denial.
It drove home, and no time was allowed to the crowd
that was driven.
The preposterous-minded were cowed—they thought
time would be given.
There was no need of a steed nor a lance to pursue
them;

BALLAD MEASURES

It was decreed their own deed, and not chance, should
undo them.
The tares they had laughingly sown were ripe to the
reaping.
The trust they had leagued to disown was removed from
their keeping.
The eaters of other men's bread, the exempted from
hardship,
The excusers of impotence fled, abdicating their
wardship,
For the hate they had taught through the State brought
the State no defender,
And it passed from the roll of the Nations in headlong
surrender!

RUDYARD KIPLING.

And now three more to give the most vivid contrast:
the magic of Keats' eerie fancy, the weird vision of
Walter de la Mare, and another sea-song, by Masfield,
vigorous and full-blooded. All three have the ballad
measure; the rhythms are different; who shall analyse
the methods by which their excellent difference is
achieved?

Keats. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci.*

'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.
'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms!
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

'I see a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.'

'I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

'I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

'I set her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.

Walter de la Mare. *The Listeners.*

Is there anybody there? Said the Traveller,
Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses,
Of the forest's ferny floor:
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
Is there anybody there? he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller;
No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,

BALLAD MEASURES

Where he stood perplexed and still.
But only a host of phantom listeners
That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
To that voice from the world of men:
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
That goes down to the empty hall,
Harkening in an air stirred and shaken
By the lonely Traveller's call.
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf
Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the floor, even
Louder, and lifted his head:—
"Tell them I came, and no one answered,
That I kept my word," he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
From the one man left awake:
Aye, they heard his foot on the stirrup
And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

John Masefield, Poet Laureate. *Sea Fever*.

I must down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and
the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white
sail's shaking,

And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn
breaking.

I must down to the seas again, for the call of the running
tide

Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds
flying,

And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-
gulls crying.

I must down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way where the wind's
like a whetted knife;

And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow-
rover,

And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long
trick's over.

And finally, the aboriginal, the unmodified ballad
rhythm, applied to its aboriginal purpose of telling a
tale. Yet how ethereal, how mysterious, how full
of simplicity, how full of cunning art! The rhythms
obvious and easy, but still unlike those of any other
ballad that was ever written!

S. T. Coleridge. *Ancient Mariner*.

"The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

BALLAD MEASURES

"Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas as sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

"All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

"Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

"Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

"The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

"About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white.

"And some in dreams assured were
Of the spirit that plagued us so;
Nine fathom deep he had follow'd us
From the land of mist and snow.

* * * *

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

"The moving Moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—

"Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt away
A still and awful red.

"Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

"Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

"O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart.
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware."

CHAPTER VII

RHYTHM IN LYRIC POETRY

In the nineteenth century the liberty, that Shakespeare won for himself and Milton nobly used without any conscious debt, came back to us again. Great lyrics were written in English during the eighteenth century, but the range of rhythmical variety was more narrow, just as the range of vocabulary, expression, and even of emotion, was more limited. With Keats full freedom in the service of poetry was recovered, and it has never since been lost.

The following selections follow chronological order very nearly. I am not going to apologise for omissions. I shall be satisfied if I have included nothing that would be better away. All these poets in the passages quoted weave out of the elements of number, quantity, and stress, their own wonderful harmonies. In the *Intimations of Immortality* Wordsworth rises to his highest pitch, but, even in the lines quoted here, he often falls below the mark, and the passages omitted can, from our point of view, well be spared. Tennyson, in his songs, achieves his most excellent music. I am glad to be permitted to include something of Meredith and of Francis Thompson, both of whom at their best are great but too often fall away. There are many, many other modern poems that I should be glad to quote, but these are enough to show that our contemporaries keep up the magnificent tradition

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

of English rhythm. The section ends with a jewel some fifty words long. I trust it does justice to a master who has written too little of English verse. The greatest lyric poet of our own half-century is reserved for a separate place of honour.

Each and every example is intended to illustrate an individual rhythm. If any is not admirable, my judgement must be at fault.

Byron.

There be none of Beauty's daughters
With a magic like Thee;
And like music on the waters
Is thy sweet voice to me:
When, as if its sound were causing
The charmed ocean's pausing,
The waves lie still and gleaming,
And the lull'd winds seem dreaming:
And the midnight moon is weaving,
Her bright chain o'er the deep,
Whose breast is gently heaving
As an infant's asleep:
So the spirit bows before thee
To listen and adore thee;
With a full but soft emotion,
Like the swell of Summer's ocean.

Wordsworth. *Intimations of Immortality.*

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparell'd in celestial light,

RHYTHM IN LYRIC POETRY

The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,
 By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

 The rainbow comes and goes,
 And lovely is the rose;
 The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
 Waters on a starry night
 Are beautiful and fair;
 The sunshine is a glorious birth;
 But yet I know where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting
 And cometh from afar;
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home.
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows.
 He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.
Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a mother's mind
And no unworthy aim,
The homely nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her inmate, Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Keats. *From the Ode to Autumn.*

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft,
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Keats. *Ode to a Nightingale.*

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:

RHYTHM IN LYRIC POETRY

'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thy happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singing of summer in full-throated ease.

O for a draught of vintage, that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sun-burnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

.
I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

.
Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Keats. From *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

RHYTHM IN LYRIC POETRY

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea-shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

Tennyson. *Song from The Princess.* III.

Sweet and low, sweet and low
Wind of the western sea,
Low, low, breathe and blow,
Wind of the western sea!
Over the rolling waters go,
Come from the dying moon, and blow,
Blow him again to me;
While my little one, while my pretty one, sleeps.

Sleep and rest, sleep and rest,
Father will come to thee soon;
Rest, rest, on mother's breast,
Father will come to thee soon;
Father will come to his babe in the nest,
Silver sails all out of the west
Under the silver moon:
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty one, sleep.

Tennyson. *Song from The Princess. IV.*

The splendour falls on castle walls
 And snowy summits old in story:
 The long light shakes across the lakes.
 And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
 Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
 Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.
 O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
 And thinner, clearer, farther going!
 O sweet and far from cliff and scar
 The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
 Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
 Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.
 O love, they die in yon rich sky,
 They faint on hill or field or river:
 Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
 And grow for ever and for ever.
 Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
 And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

Matthew Arnold. *The Scholar Gipsy.*

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
 And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
 Before this strange disease of modern life,
 With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
 Its heads o'ertax'd, its palsied hearts, was rife—
 Fly hence, our contact fear!
 Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood!
 Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern
 From her false friend's approach in Hades turn,
 Wave us away, and keep thy solitude!

RHYTHM IN LYRIC POETRY

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
Still clutching the inviolable shade,
With a free, onward impulse brushing through,
By night, the silver'd branches of the glade—
Far on the forest-skirts, where none pursue,
On some mild pastoral slope
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales
Freshen thy flowers as in former years
With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,
From the dark dingles, to the nightingales!

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!
For strong the infection of our mental strife,
Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;
And we should win thee from thy own fair life,
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd thy powers,
And thy clear aims be cross and shifting made;
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!
—As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily,
The fringes of a southward-facing brow
Among the Ægæan isles;
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,
Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in brine—
And knew the intruders on his ancient home.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

The young light-hearted masters of the waves—
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more sail;
And day and night held on indignantly
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves
Outside the Western straits; and unbent sails
There, where down cloudy cliffs through sheets of
foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

George Meredith. From *Love in the Valley*.

Shy as the squirrel and wayward as the swallow,
Swift as the swallow along the river's light
Circleting the surface to meet his mirrored winglets,
Fleeter she seems in her stay than in her flight.
Shy as the squirrel that leaps among the pine-tops,
Wayward as the swallow overhead at set of sun,
She whom I love is hard to catch and conquer,
Hard, but O the glory of the winning were she won!

Heartless she is as the shadow in the meadows
Flying to the hills on a blue and breezy noon.
No, she is athirst and drinking up her wonder:
Earth to her is young as the slip of the new moon.
Deals she an unkindness, 'tis but her rapid measure,
Even as in a dance; and her smile can heal no less:
Like the swinging May-cloud that pelts the flowers with
hailstones
Off a sunny border, she was made to bruise and bless.

RHYTHM IN LYRIC POETRY

Stepping down the hill with her fair companions,
Arm in arm, all against the raying West,
Boldly she sings, to the merry tune she marches,
Brave is her shape, and sweeter unpossessed.
Sweeter, for she is what my heart first awaking
Whispered the world was; morning light is she.
Love that so desires would fain keep her changeless;
Fain would fling the net, and fain have her free.

Robert Louis Stevenson. *In the Highlands.*

In the highlands, in the country places,
Where the old plain men have rosy faces,
And the young fair maidens
Quiet eyes;
Where essential silence cheers and blesses,
And for ever in the hill-recesses
Her more lovely music
Broods and dies.

O to mount again where erst I haunted;
Where the old red hills are bird-enchanted,
And the low green meadows
Bright with sward;
And when even dies, the million-tinted,
And the night has come, and planets glinted,
Lo, the valley hollow
Lamp-bestarred!

O to dream, O to awake and wander
There, and with delight to take and render,
Through the trance of silence,
Quiet breath;

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

Lo! for there, among the flowers and grasses,
Only the mightier movement sounds and passes;
Only winds and rivers,
Life and death.

Francis Thompson

'In no Strange Land.'

From *'The Kingdom of God.'*

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

Does the fish soar to find the ocean,
The eagle plunge to find the air—
That we ask of the stars in motion
If they have rumour of thee there?

Not where the wheeling systems darken,
And our benumbed conceiving soars!—
The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;—
Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry;—and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacob's ladder
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

RHYTHM IN LYRIC POETRY

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water
Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

Arthur Symons. *In Fountain Court.*

The fountain murmuring of sleep,
A drowsy tune;
The flickering green of leaves that keep
The light of June;
Peace, through a slumbering afternoon,
The peace of June.
A waiting ghost, in the blue sky,
The white curved moon;
June, hushed and breathless, waits, and I
Wait, too, with June;
Come, through the lingering afternoon,
Soon, love, come soon.

Lady Margaret Sackville. *Romance.*

Come, come to me!
I am the Sea,
I am all that can never be;
The whirling wave, the steady light
Of ships slow sailing out into the night;
Wind, wave and leaping spray,
And the lands which are very far away;
Every rainbow-circled shore,
Where you may stay
A night and a day,

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

No more!
I kiss your eyes and leave them blind;
I am around you and above;
I am the road that lies before,
And behind;
I am Morning—I am Love!
I shake my gleaming,
My sun-splashed wings,
Whilst you lie dreaming
Of other things.
The sun shakes your grating,
The wind's at the door;
Oh! ride forth, for all the world is waiting,
And come back no more!
Am I not fair
With my wishing cap on my gold hair?
Am I not fleet
Who have feathered shoulders and wingèd feet?
Listen! listen! have you heard
Such a song ever,
As now beneath the wandering moon I sing?
Each wild-winged bird
Whose throat is mad with Spring
Has sought to learn it and might never!
Listen! whereso'er I pass
Laughter stirs among the grass,
And the withered tree
Breaks into leaf,
And Grief
Smiles through heavy eyes, tear-laden,
And becomes my waiting-maiden,
Serving me!

RHYTHM IN LYRIC POETRY

Maurice Baring. From '*In Memoriam A. H.*'

And in the portals of the sacred hall
You hear the trumpet's call,
At dawn upon the silvery battlement,
Re-echo through the deep
And bid the sons of God to rise from sleep,
And with a shout to hail
The sunrise on the city of the Grail:
The music that proud Lucifer in Hell
Missed more than all the joys that he forwent.
You hear the solemn bell
At vespers, when the oriflammes are furled;
And then you know that somewhere in the world,
That shines far-off beneath you like a gem,
They think of you, and when you think of them
You know that they will wipe away their tears,
And cast aside their fears;
That they will have it so,
And in no otherwise;
That it is well with them because they know,
With faithful eyes,
Fixed forward and turned upwards to the skies,
That it is well with you,
Among the chosen few,
Among the very brave, the very true.

F. W. Bourdillon. *Light.*

The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies
When love is done.

A. E. Housman. *Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries.*

These, in the day when Heaven was falling,
The hour when Earth's foundation fled,
Followed their mercenary calling
And took their wages and are dead.

Their shoulders held the sky suspended;
They stood, and Earth's foundations stay;
What God abandoned, these defended
And saved the sum of things for pay.

CHAPTER VIII

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

A VALID definition of the lyrical form in poetry cannot be found, nor is one needed. The etymological and the historical definitions both fail, and perhaps still more the philosophical. But most of us would, I think, agree that the poems included in Chapter VII are lyrical, excepting the two stanzas of A. E. Housman with which that chapter ends. That poem is strictly speaking "Elegiac": that is, it sounds a note of mourning; but the elegiac form, as developed by the Latins, was used for many divergent purposes, and least of all for lamentation. The name "elegiac" has for us moderns little significance.

The extracts that follow are selected for their unusual form. *Kubla Khan* is an unique and romantic fragment, with a strange and indefinable music. The melancholy chant of the Lotos-Eaters serves its listless, hopeless purpose, and needs no category to fix its character. And then we come to another metrical form, the quatrains of *In Memoriam*. The eight-syllable line, fluent in rhythm: how different from the octosyllabics of Scott! How variously attuned by Tennyson to the fleeting moods and memories which drove him to indite them!

And then we come to another pattern, invented perhaps by Fitzgerald:—quatrains of decasyllables

with three lines rhyming and one line running loose. A translation faithfully based upon its Omar (so we are assured by scholars) and yet in its essence an original poem which will survive so long as the English tongue is read. The apolaustic, disillusioned philosophy would be at home amid any form of civilisation that had grown tired of itself, among any philosophic society that had come to pronounce all dogmas vain, all creeds illusory. The lion and the lizard, the wild ass, are exotic; Jamshyd is unknown in *our* archives; but it needs no effort to find their counterpart in this region of the globe and this community of ours. And as for the rhythm and the music—if the charm of Omar is as great as that of Fitzgerald in this poem, it is no wonder that the fame of the Persian should have endured throughout eight hundred years, and that he should have inspired to this long labour of love an alien poet of Nordic race and occidental traditions. No apology is needed for quoting nearly half the poem without attempting to dissect out the means by which Fitzgerald's miracle is wrought.

Edmund Gosse's triplets are not enough to perpetuate his memory as a poet, and yet it is right that they should be printed here. Many, who were fortunate enough to be in Cambridge in the eighties when Gosse throughout four years was almost a resident member of our college, owe much to him not only as Clark Lecturer but also as a friend. Edmund Blunden's admirable picture of dusk in late autumn supplies yet another variant of the Ballad quatrain and its rhythms.

The sonnet form, like that of the Rondel, with which the series closes, does not lend itself to any startling

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

rhythmical effects. Its metrical form is too precise and self-contained to allow of any surprising movements. But each of these poems is worthy of study for the merits of its construction, and the grace of its progression; such creations are living things, and the beauty of rhythm is an inseparable element in the beauty of life. Need it be repeated that rhythm, though its elements are number, quantity, and stress, has a movement, a quality, a flavour, above and beyond all measure and pattern, which can be felt but not analysed, which can only be defined by examples, and worshipped by the acolyte, who perceives it?

S. T. Coleridge. *Kubla Khan.*

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossom'd many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As 'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reach'd the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war! . . .

Tennyson. *The Lotos Eaters.*

Hateful is the dark-blue sky
Vaulted o'er the dark-blue sea.
Death is the end of life; ah, why
Should life all labour be?
Let us alone. Time draweth onward fast
And in a little while our lips are dumb.
Let us alone. What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful Past.
Let us alone. What pleasure can we have?
To war with evil. Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?
All things have rest, and ripen toward the grave
In silence; ripen, fall and cease;
Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful
ease.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

Tennyson. *In Memoriam.* LXXXVI.

Sweet after showers, ambrosial air,
That rollest from the gorgeous gloom
Of evening over brake and bloom
And meadow, slowly breathing bare
The round of space, and rapt below
Thro' all the dewy-tassell'd wood,
And shadowing down the horned flood
In ripples, fan my brows and blow
The fever from my cheek, and sigh
The full new life that feeds thy breath
Throughout my frame, till Doubt and Death,
Ill brethren, let the fancy fly
From belt to belt of crimson seas
On leagues of odour streaming far,
To where in yonder orient star
A hundred spirits whisper 'Peace.'

Fitzgerald. *Omar Khayyam.*

XII

A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!

XIII

Some for the Glories of this World, and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

XIV

Look to the blowing Rose about us—'Lo,
Laughing,' she says, 'into the world I blow,
At once the silken tassel of my Purse
Tear, and its Treasure on the Garden throw.'

XV

And those who husbanded the Golden grain,
And those who flung it to the winds like Rain,
Alike to no such aureate Earth are turn'd
As, buried once, Men want dug up again.

XVI

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face,
Lighting a little hour or two—is gone.

XVII

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai
Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day
How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp
Abode his destined Hour, and went his way.

XVIII

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep;
And Bahram, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass
Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep.

XIX

I sometimes think that never blows so red
The Rose as where some buried Cæsar bled;
That every Hyacinth the Garden wears
Dropt in her Lap from some once lovely Head.

XX

And this reviving Herb whose tender Green
Fledges the River-Lip on which we lean—
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely Lip it springs unseen!

XXI

Ah, my Beloved, fill the Cup that clears
To-day of past Regrets and Future Fears:
To-Morrow!—Why, To-morrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's Sev'n thousand Years.

XXII

For some we loved, the loveliest and the best
That from his Vintage rolling Time hath prest,
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before,
And one by one crept silently to rest.

XXVII

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same door where in I went.

XXVIII

With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
And this was all the Harvest that I reap'd—
'I came like Water, and like Wind I go.'

XXIX

Into this Universe, and Why not knowing
Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing.

XXX

What, without asking, hither hurried Whence?
And, without asking, Whither hurried hence!
Oh, many a Cup of this forbidden Wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence!

XXXI

Up from Earth's Centre through the Seventh Gate
I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate;
And many a Knot unravel'd by the Road;
But not the Master-knot of Human Fate.

XXXII

There was the Door to which I found no Key;
There was the Veil through which I might not see:
Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee.
There was—and then no more of Thee and Me.

* * * * *

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

LXVI

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell:
 And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
And answer'd, 'I Myself am Heav'n and Hell:'

LXVII

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,
And Hell the Shadow from a Soul on fire,
 Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.

LXVIII

We are no other than a moving row
Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
 Round with the Sun-illuminated Lantern held
In Midnight by the Master of the Show;

LXIX

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays
Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days;
 Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,
And one by one back in the Closet lays.

LXX

The Ball no question makes of Ayes and Noes,
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes,
 And He that toss'd you down into the Field,
He knows about it all—He knows—He knows!

LXXI

The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

LXXII

And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky,
Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die,

Lift not your hands to It for help—for It
As impotently moves as you or I.

Edmund Gosse. *Lying in the Grass.*

Between two russet tufts of summer grass,
I watch the world through hot air as through glass,
And by my face sweet lights and colours pass.

Before me, dark against the fading sky,
I watch three mowers mowing, as I lie:
With brawny arms they sweep in harmony.

Brown English faces by the sun burnt red,
Rich glowing colour on bare throat and head,
My heart would leap to watch them, were I dead!

And in my strong young living as I lie,
I seem to move with them in harmony,—
A fourth is mowing, and that fourth am I.

The music of the scythes that glide and leap,
The young men whistling as their great arms sweep,
And all the perfume and sweet sense of sleep,

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

The weary butterflies that droop their wings,
The dreamy nightingale that hardly sings,
And all the lassitude of happy things

Is mingling with the warm and pulsing blood
That gushes through my veins, a languid flood,
And feeds my spirit as the sap a bud.

Edmund Blunden. *The Waggoner.*

The old waggon drudges through the miry lane
By the skulking pond where the pollards frown,
Notched, dumb, surly images of pain;
On a dulled earth the night droops down.

Wincing to slow and wistful airs
The leaves on the shrubbed oaks know their hour,
And the unknown wandering spoiler bares
The thorned black hedge of a mournful shower.

Small bodies fluster in the dead brown wrack
As the stumbling shaft-horse jingles past,
And the waggoner flicks his whip a crack:
The odd light flares on shadows vast

Over the lodges and oasts and byres
Of the darkened farm; the moment hangs wan
As though nature flagged and all desires.
But in the dim court the ghost is gone

From the hug-secret yew to the penthouse wall,
And stooping there seems to listen to
The waggoner leading the gray to stall,
As centuries past itself would do.

Laurence Binyon. *For the Fallen.*

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time:
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are
known
As the stars are known to the Night;

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.

George Meredith. *Lucifer in Starlight.*

On a starred night Prince Lucifer uprose.
Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened,
Where sinners hugged their spectre of repose.
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
And now upon his western wing he leaned,
Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careened,
Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows.
Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars
With memory of the old revolt from Awe,
He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
Around the ancient track marched rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.

Swinburne. *Rondel.*

These many years since we began to be,
What have the gods done with us? what with me,
What with my love? they have shown me fates and
fears,
Harsh springs, and fountains bitterer than the sea,
Grief a fixed star, and joy a vane that veers,
These many years.

Swinburne, like Bridges, was an Etonian in an age when composition in Greek after the models of the Greek masters was an accomplishment of which gentlemen of high culture were proud. At Oxford he found a like atmosphere. The Greek spirit inflamed him, the Greek *technique* entered into his craftsman's soul. *Atalanta* and *Erechtheus* are great poetic dramas inspired by Greek models and Greek ideals. Swinburne wedded the English language to elements of the Greek prosody by an organic union which no other poet has attempted to create. He composed poems with strophe and anti-strophe and epode and all the typical procession of movements. But he did not violate the inborn nature of the English language; he did not confuse quantity with stress, like Goethe and Longfellow; nor did he, like Bridges, endeavour to reckon his measure by quantity alone, neglecting stress. He reckons both by quantity and by stress.

In all the best English poetry quantity tells; the difference between the rhythms of the *Ancient Mariner* and those of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* is due to the masterly use of quantity, which by Coleridge is disposed cunningly and not by rule or plan to shape the movement. Scott is satisfied if he gets a bold, telling and vigorous line with the beats in the right place. But Swinburne's beats fall regularly, and at the same time his quantities conform to the classical rules. His anapæsts, his dactyls, his choriambes, his spondees, satisfy a strict time sense. In our language which, compared with Greek or Latin, is overloaded with consonants, the equation—two short syllables occupy the same rhythmical time as one long one—cannot so

nearly correspond to the facts as in the classical languages. On the other hand, the genius of the English language makes it easy to dwell a little longer or less long upon a syllable, and thus the adjustment is easily achieved. The quantitative pattern, in particular, of *A Forsaken Garden* is well worth study; it is as true as the pattern of an ode of Pindar.

Indeed, the effect of Swinburne's lyrics rather suffers by excess of regularity than by defect. The beats fall almost too exactly; the intervening quantities are almost more accurately timed than comports with the characteristic liberty of English speech. That is specially noticeable in the Chorus from *Atalanta* quoted below. But machine-made regularity could not be alleged of the other three which are in almost perfect correspondence line with line, and stanza with stanza. Almost trick-work it is, but Swinburne achieves success, by virtue of his astonishing command and control of language, and his characteristic vocabulary. Virtuosity is his outstanding quality: his poetry could have been written without rhymes, and yet would have given the same effect of compact and coherent structure. In fact, Swinburne runs a little short of rhymes; one gets tired of sorrow, borrow, morrow; golden and beholden. By the way, is not Swinburne's use of the word "beholden" peculiar to himself? It certainly is archaic and rare at that.

But Gosse goes too far when he says that Swinburne revolutionised English prosody. His *technique* has not been widely imitated. Perhaps the nearest approach to it is in Mr. Kipling's *City of Brass* (Chapter VII, above). But Mr. Kipling does not study his quantities

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

so carefully as did Swinburne, and of course no two men could be further apart than Kipling and Swinburne in their attitude towards poetry and life. It is doubtful whether Kipling was influenced by Swinburne when he wrote this or anything else. However, I am travelling outside my brief, and had better pass on to "lead" my specimens, as a pleader leads evidence carefully selected for a purpose.

It is my suggestion that Swinburne alone has written verse in English consciously and consistently based on an accurate quantitative prosody, and at the same time conforming to a firm prosody of stress. A few lines of Tennyson alone can be brought into competition with his work. But I doubt whether the experiment will be followed up. There is a risk that the content of such verse would be impoverished by the cost of the technical effort.

Atalanta in Calydon.

CHORUS.

Before the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran;
Pleasure, with pain for leaven;
Summer with flowers that fell;
Remembrance fallen from heaven,
And madness risen from hell;
Strength without hands to smite;
Love that endures for a breath;
Night, the shadow of light,
And life, the shadow of death.

SWINBURNE

And the high gods took in hand
Fire, and the falling of tears,
And a measure of sliding sand
From under the feet of the years;
And froth and drift of the sea;
And dust of the labouring earth;
And bodies of things to be
In the houses of death and of birth;
And wrought with weeping and laughter,
And fashioned with loathing and love
With life before and after
And death beneath and above,
For a day and a night and a morrow,
That his strength might endure for a span
With travail and heavy sorrow,
The holy spirit of man.

From the winds of the north and the south
They gathered as unto strife;
They breathed upon his mouth,
They filled his body with life;
Eyesight and speech they wrought
For the veils of the soul therein,
A time for labour and thought,
A time to serve and to sin;
They gave him light in his ways,
And love, and a space for delight,
And beauty and length of days,
And night, and sleep in the night.
His speech is a burning fire;
With his lips he travaileth;
In his heart is a blind desire,
In his eyes foreknowledge of death;

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

He weaves, and is clothed with derision;
Sows, and he shall not reap;
His life is a watch or a vision
Between a sleep and a sleep.

A Vision of Spring in Winter.

I

O tender time that love thinks long to see,
Sweet foot of spring that with her footfall sows
Late snowlike flowery leavings of the snows,
Be not too long irresolute to be;
O mother-month, where have they hidden thee?
Out of the pale time of the flowerless rose
I reach my heart out toward the springtime lands,
I stretch my spirit forth to the fair hours
The purplest of the prime;
I leave my soul down over them, with hands
Made wide to take the ghostly growths of flowers;
I send my love back to the lovely time.

II

Where has the greenwood hid thy gracious head?
Veiled with what visions while the grey world grieves,
Or muffled with what shadows of green leaves,
What warm intangible green shadows spread
To sweeten the sweet twilight for thy bed?
What sleep enchants thee? what delight deceives?
Where the deep dreamlike dew before the dawn
Feels not the fingers of the sunlight yet
Its silver web unweave.

SWINBURNE

Thy footless ghost on some unfooted lawn
Whose air the unrisen sunbeams fear to fret
Lives a ghost's life of daylong dawn and eve.

III

Sunrise it sees not, neither set of star,
Large nightfall, nor imperial plenilune,
Nor strong sweet shape of the full-breasted noon;
But where the silver-sandalled shadows are,
Too soft for arrows of the sun to mar,
Moves with the mild gait of an ungrown moon:
Hard overhead the half-lit crescent swims,
The tender-coloured night draws hardly breath,
The light is listening;
They watch the dawn of slender-shapen limbs,
Virginal, born again of doubtful death,
Chill foster-father of the weaning spring.

IV

As sweet desire of day before the day,
As dreams of love before the true love born,
From the outer edge of winter overworn
The ghost arisen of May before the May
Takes through dim air her unawakened way,
The gracious ghost of morning risen ere morn.
With little unblown breasts and child-eyed looks
Following, the very maid, the girl-child spring,
Lifts windward her bright brows,
Dips her light feet in warm and moving brooks,
And kindles with her own mouth's colouring
The fearful firstlings of the plumeless boughs.

The Eve of Revolution.

3

I set the trumpet to my lips and blow.
The height of night is shaken, the skies break,
The winds and stars and waters come and go
By fits of breath and light and sound, that wake
As out of sleep, and perish as the show
Built up of sleep, when all her strengths forsake
The sense-compelling spirit; the depths glow,
The heights flash, and the roots and summits shake
Of earth in all her mountains,
And the inner foamless fountains
And wellsprings of her fast-bound forces quake;
Yea, the whole air of life
Is set on fire of strife,
Till change unmake things made and love remake;
Reason and love, whose names are one,
Seeing reason is the sunlight shed from love the sun.

A Forsaken Garden.

All are at one now, roses and lovers,
Not known of the cliffs and the fields and the sea.
Not a breath of the time that has been hovers
In the air now soft with a summer to be.
Not a breath shall there sweeten the seasons hereafter
Of the flowers or the lovers that laugh now or weep,
When as they that are free now of weeping and laughter
We shall sleep.

SWINBURNE

Here death may deal not again for ever;
Here change may come not till all change end.
From the graves they have made they shall rise up
never,
Who have left naught living to ravage and rend.
Earth, stones, and thorns of the wild ground growing,
While the sun and the rain live, these shall be;
Till a last wind's breath upon all these blowing
Roll the sea.

Till the slow sea rise and the sheer cliff crumble,
Till terrace and meadow the deep gulfs drink,
Till the strength of the waves of the high tides humble
The fields that lessen, the rocks that shrink,
Here now in his triumph where all things falter,
Stretched out on the spoils that his own hand spread,
As a god self-slain on his own strange altar,
Death lies dead.

Athens [and England].

Sons of Athens born in spirit and truth are all born
free men;
Most of all, we, nurtured where the north wind holds
his reign:
Children all we sea-folk of the Salaminian seamen,
Sons of them that beat back Persia they that beat
back Spain.
Since the songs of Greece fell silent, none like ours have
risen;
Since the sails of Greece fell slack, no ships have sailed
like ours;
How should we lament not, if her spirit sit in prison?

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

How should we rejoice not, if her wreaths renew their
flowers?

All the world is sweeter, if the Athenian violet quicken:

All the world is brighter, if the Athenian sun return:

All things foul on earth wax fainter, by that sun's light
stricken:

All ill growths are withered, where those fragrant
flower-lights burn.

All the wandering waves of seas with all their warring
waters

Roll the record on for ever of the sea-fight there,
When the capes were battle's lists, and all the straits
were slaughter's,

And the myriad Medes as foam-flakes on the scat-
tering air.

Ours the lightning was that cleared the north and lit
the nations,

But the light that gave the whole world light of old
was she:

Ours an age or twain, but hers are endless generations:

All the world is hers at heart, and most of all are we.

A Nymph Slept.

What light, what shadow, diviner than dawn or night,
Draws near, makes pause, and again—or I dream—
draws near?

More soft than shadow, more strong than the strong
sun's light,

More pure than moonbeams—yea, but the rays run
sheer

As fire from the sun through the dusk of the pinewood,
clear

SWINBURNE

And constant; yea, but the shadow itself is bright
That the light clothes round with love that is one
with fear.

Above and behind it the noon and the woodland lie,
Terrible, radiant with mystery, superb and subdued,
Triumphant in silence; and hardly the sacred sky
Seems free from the tyrannous weight of the dumb
fierce mood
Which rules as with fire and invasion of beams that
brood

The breathless rapture of earth till its hour pass by
And leave her spirit released and her peace renewed.

I sleep not: sleep would die of a dream so strange;
A dream so sweet would die as a rainbow dies,
As a sunbow laughs and is lost of the waves that range
And reck not of light that flickers or spray that flies.
But the sun withdraws not, the woodland shrinks not
or sighs,
No sweet thing sickens with sense or with fear of change;
Light wounds not, darkness blinds not, my steadfast
eyes.

Only the soul in my sense that receives the soul,
Whence now my spirit is kindled with breathless bliss
Knows well if the light that wounds it with love makes
whole,

If hopes that carol be louder than fears that hiss,
If truth be spoken of flowers and of waves that kiss,
Of clouds and stars that contend for a sunbright goal.
And yet may I dream that I dream not indeed of this?

B. Robert Bridges.

The last of the Masters, who has earned a separate niche as contributing to the continuous development of our free, elastic, varied, and musical rhythms in poetry, is Robert Bridges. The three passages that follow are a sufficient illustration of his admirable touch. He works after no man's pattern, but he is in concord with the best.

The *Testament of Beauty* will be judged by future generations; it is too soon to hazard a verdict either on its manner or its matter; with its matter we are not here concerned. But it is permissible to regret that this great work should seem to offer countenance to modern experiments which do not deserve to be treated with the same respect as itself. There is one rhythm of verse and another of prose; each may be admirable; each has allowed and still allows an abundant freedom to those whose individuality is swayed only by their love of beauty, of rhythmical order, and of truth in expression. Many have essayed and essayed in vain to define poetry. We may welcome the best poetical prose, and for our sins we may be pestered with prosy poetry. But dangers await those who mingle the two draughts. Though we may not be able to mark the boundary, it is safest to keep well on the hither side of it, whether we aim at prose or at poetry. Those anarchists, who write that which is neither prose nor poetry and exclaim that they have a right to express their individuality, should be very sure that such individuality is worthy of expression, "and then some," as the Americans say.

BRIDGES

Bridges had won his right to express the thoughts of his mind in whatever shape best suited the trend of his thought. The *Testament* will be judged by our successors on the value of its content and the virtue of its vision. I will only quote one passage which is complete in itself, a little resting place, a picture thrown in by the way. I leave it to my readers to consider whether it might not better have been cast into metrical form, with or without rhyme. In character it approaches very nearly to much of his best descriptive work.

A Passer-by.

Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
 Leaning across the bosom of the argent West,
That fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
 Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?
Ah! soon, when winter has all our tales oppress,
When skies are cold and misty, and hail is hurling,
 Wilt thou glide on the blue Pacific, or rest
In a summer haven asleep, thy white sails furling?
I there before thee, in the country that well thou
 knowest,
 Already arrived am inhaling the odorous air:
I watch thee enter unerringly where thou goest,
 And anchor queen of the strange shipping there,
 Thy sails for awnings spread, thy masts bare:
Nor is aught from the foaming reef to the snow-capped,
 grandest,
 Peak, that is over the feathery palms more fair
Than thou, so upright, so stately, and still thou
 standest.

RHYTHM IN ENGLISH POETRY

And yet, O splendid ship, unhailed and nameless,
I know not if, aiming a fancy, I rightly divine
That thou hast a purpose joyful, a courage blameless
Thy port assigned in a happier land than mine.
But for all I have given thee, beauty enough is thine,
As thou, aslant with trim tackle and shrouding,
From the proud nostril curve of a prow's line
In the offing scatterest foam, thy white sails crowding.

The Hill Beside the Thames.

There is a hill beside the silver Thames
Shady with birch and beech and odorous pine:
And brilliant underfoot with thousand gems
Steeplly the thickets to his floods decline.

Straight trees in every place
Their thick tops interlace
And pendant branches trace their foliage fine
Upon his watery face.

Swift from the sweltering pasturage he flows:
His stream, alert to seek the pleasant shade,
Pictures his gentle purpose, as he goes
Straight to the caverned pool his toil has made:
His winter floods lay bare
The stout roots in the air:
His summer streams are cool, when they have played
Among their fibrous hair.

A rushy island guards the sacred bower
And hides it from the meadow, where in peace
The lazy cows wrench many a scented flower,

BRIDGES

Robbing the golden market of the bees:
And laden barges float
By banks of myosote
And scented flag and golden flower-de-lys
Delay the floating boat.

The Storm is Over.

The storm is over, the land hushes to rest:
The tyrannous wind, its strength fordone,
Is fallen back in the west
To couch with the sinking sun.
The last clouds fare
With fainting speed, and their thin streamers fly
In melting drifts of the sky.
Already the birds in the air
Appear again; the rooks return to their haunt,
And one by one,
Proclaiming aloud their care,
Renew their peaceful chant.
Torn and shattered the trees their branches again reset,
They trim afresh the fair
Few green and golden leaves withheld from the storm
And awhile will be handsome yet.
To-morrow's suns shall caress
Their remnant of loveliness:
In quiet days for a time
Sad Autumn lingering warm
Shall humour their faded pride.
But ah! the leaves of summer that lie on the ground!
What havoc! The laughing timbrels of June,

That curtained the bird's cradles, and screened their
 song,
 That sheltered the cooing doves at noon,
 Of airy fans the delicate throng,—
 Torn and scattered around:
 Far out afield they lie,
 In the watery furrows die,
 In grassy pools of the flood they sink and drown,
 Green-golden, orange, vermilion, golden and brown.
 The high year's flaunting crown
 Shattered and trampled down.
 The day is done; the tired land looks for night:
 She prays for the night to keep
 In peace her nerves of delight:
 While silver mist upstealeth silently,
 And the broad cloud-driving moon in the clear sky,
 Lifts o'er the firs her shining shield
 And in her tranquil light
 Sleep falls on forest and field.
 See ! Sleep hath fallen; the trees are asleep;
 The night is come. The land is wrapt in sleep.

From the Testament of Beauty.

The sky's unresting cloudland, that with varying play
 Sifteth the sunlight through its figured shades, that now
 Stand in massive range, cumulated stupendous
 Mountainous, snowbellowy up-piled in dazzling sheen,
 Now like sailing ships on a calm ocean drifting
 Now scattered wispy waifs that neath the eager blast
 Disperse in air; or now parcelling the icy mane
 Highspread in fine diaper of silver and mother-of-pearl

BRIDGES

Freaking the intense azure; now scurrying overhead,
Wild ink-hued random racers that fling sheeted rain
Gustily, and with garish bows laughing o'erarch the
earth,

Or, if the spirit of storm be abroad, huge molten glooms
Mount on the horizon stealthily, and gathering as they
climb

Deep-freighted with live lightning, thunder and
drenching flood,

Rebuff the winds, and with black-purpling terror
impend

Till they be driven away, when grave night peacefully
Clearing her heavenly verdure of its turbid veils

Layeth bare the playthings of creation's babyhood;

And the immortal fireballs of her uttermost space

Twinkle like friendly rushlights on the countryside.

CONCLUSION

ALL life expresses itself in rhythm. There is a rhythm of movement, a rhythm of form, a rhythm of sound, a rhythm of the days and the nights, and of all living things. Only death is the negation of rhythm, and death itself initiates new rhythms. The supreme Demiurgus, who fashions our bodies and our faculties, shapes also the great hills, the rivers, and the oceans. In them we see reflected the mysteries of his own rhythm. The stars in the heaven bear witness to stupendous rhythms of which we can see the beauty, though their course and proportions can only be measured by *formulæ* which leave beauty out of account.

Dancing, and music, and speech, strive to express the inward rhythms of our souls, our minds, and our spirits. Perhaps this little book may help to dispel some of the false conceptions of rhythm which pedants have evolved for the mystification of the innocent. When these errors have been cleared away we shall better understand the music which our poets have endeavoured to make—some of them, alas, thwarted and misled by the conventions of custom and the false analysis of the would-be wise. At any rate, the hours that my readers may be led to spend in studying the rhythmical creations of great poets, whether in our own English speech, or in two or three great languages which we may have learnt or mislearnt at school, cannot fail to win satisfaction even if all my observations

CONCLUSION

be discarded and refuted. I have had my own reward although what I have put together may never be accepted, or understood.

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